# HERMENEUTICS, POLITICS, *and the* HISTORY *of* RELIGIONS

*The Contested Legacies of*
JOACHIM WACH & MIRCEA ELIADE



*Edited by*

CHRISTIAN K. WEDEMEYER
WENDY DONIGER

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*In memory of Matei Calinescu,*
*honored colleague, dear friend*

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# Introduction I: Two Scholars, a "School," and a Conference

*Christian K. Wedemeyer*

The chapters in this volume are the product of a conference held November 3–4, 2006, at the University of Chicago Divinity School. This congress represents the integration of two initially separate, though integrally related impulses: to reassess the work, lives, and scholarly legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade on the occasions of the fiftieth anniversary of the untimely death of the former (2005) and the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the latter (2007). Responsibility (or culpability, perhaps) for the impulse to explore the legacy of Wach was mine; that of Eliade, of Wendy Doniger and Matthew Kapstein. Serendipity found the three of us in mendicant moments in or around the office of our dean simultaneously, and so events were set in motion that led to an integrated program entitled "Hermeneutics in History: Mircea Eliade, Joachim Wach, and the Science of Religions." The discussions took place in the intermediate year (2006) in the room that had served as the Divinity School library during the tenure of these scholars (now the lecture hall), with the participants discussing and debating the issues raised by the chapters contained herein while seated round-table at the lone remaining study table from the old Divinity Library.

The conference title is worthy of at least a brief comment, insofar as it to some degree reflects the initial conception of the dialogue that was to ensue. In part, our intent was to occasion a conversation that would attempt to engage the work of these two scholars, for both of whom a hermeneutical perspective was central to their scholarly

project—a Diltheyan and a so-called total hermeneutics, respectively—while (or through) situating them within their historical contexts. With this in mind, we asked the invited contributors to address (at least in part) the biographical, lived, human-all-too-human aspect of the scholarship of our two subjects. The subtitle of the conference, "Mircea Eliade, Joachim Wach, and the Science of Religions," while perhaps jarring in this day and age of postmodernity, was chosen precisely for its denaturalizing qualities. We deliberately avoided the more intuitive "Eliade, Wach and the *History* of Religions," as the latter term is so central a term of art in both scholars' own rhetorical projects that such a framing would have been inadequate for the project we envisioned. Our intention was to problematize, rather than naturalize, their role in and relationship to the study of religions; to encourage the interpretation of these scholars and their work from a perspective not totally alien, though not identical, to their own; to be fair, yet impartial, in assessing the contributions they made to scholarship on religion in their pasts and their legacies today. In short, it was not the aim of those gathered merely to raise a glass to honor our esteemed forebears, in some kind of archaic canonization ritual (though this was perhaps suggested by the University of Chicago's own press release about the conference)[1]—"and so say all of us." Nor yet, however, were we intent on inviting them to a historical wine cellar with the promise of an oh-so-delightful cask of amontillado—"for the love of God," as it were.[2] The intent was a critical engagement with their work in its social contexts, an assessment of the impact these thinkers have had on conditioning the present moment of scholarly research, and (perhaps) some rumination about possible futures.

We (the conference conveners and panelists) were joined in this venture by a group of very energetic and insightful graduate students from the Divinity School, who organized a special panel the following morning to present their own research on Wach and Eliade. These papers were the fruit of a seminar I conducted during the spring quarter of 2006 entitled "Readings in the History of Religions: The 'Chicago School.'" One great advantage of offering such a graduate course in Hyde Park is the availability of the papers of these figures in the Special Collections of the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library. Students were encouraged to make use of these archival materials, and the papers presented in this panel reflect the valuable insights to be garnered by

1. The News Office of the University of Chicago issued a press release on October 31, 2006, with the headline "University of Chicago to Honor and Explore the Lives of Two Historical Divinity School Professors and Scholars This Weekend." Neither of the editors of this volume was consulted in this regard.

2. This seems to have been the conclusion of several former Chicago Divines, who were convinced that (to quote perhaps the most prominent former Chicago student and faculty member to write us) "the fix was in" and that the conference was by design a "nefarious project."

studying this unique material. We are delighted to include these three chapterss (by Elaine Fisher, Anne Mocko, and Charles Preston) in this volume.

Why Wach, however? And, indeed, why Wach and Eliade? As joining these two figures in one venue perhaps unavoidably suggests that some idea of a "Chicago School" was at work, some words on this topic are perhaps in order. To what extent did these authors share a perspective? Was there in fact a Chicago School as suggested, among numerous other authorities, by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*?[3] If so, what was Wach's contribution to this school, and why has this contribution largely been obscured or forgotten?

It must be admitted from the outset that it is not at all clear to many (or even most) that the life and work of Joachim Wach is of anything but antiquarian interest today. While the impact of Eliade on the study of religion is palpable, the papers from our Wach panelists indicate that, in the present state of the art, Wach's legacy has largely been eclipsed. Steven Wasserstrom's detailed note 4, concerning the relative stature of Wach and Eliade according to Google (our current arbiter of cultural significance), for instance, gives concrete evidence (were such needed) that his work is no longer "on the radar" of our contemporary intellectual conversation.[4] Unlike Eliade, for instance, whose works continue to be reissued with forewords by notable scholars (and latter-day Chicagoans) such as Jonathan Smith and Wendy Doniger, Wach's writings have not been widely printed since Joseph Kitagawa's heroic efforts to secure his mentor's legacy—begun with the editing and publication of two posthumous works and a Festschrift in the 1950s and 1960s—concluded with the publication of English translations of his Habilitation and Kleine Schriften in the late 1980s. These latter works were out of print when I sought to order them for the aforementioned seminar in spring 2006, and—barring an

3. See "religion, study of," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2008), http://search.eb.com/eb/article-38081 (accessed April 29, 2008). The *Britannica* article on Wach asserts that he "is considered the founder of the so-called Chicago School, from which emerged such influential scholars as Mircea Eliade." See "Wach, Joachim," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2008), http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9075817 (accessed April 29, 2008).

4. I would, however, suggest that Kippenberg's claim that "his works are not reprinted" (as evidence of a "fading scholarly legacy") is not quite correct. His original works in German have continued to be reprinted on occasion: his famous Habilitation, *Religionswissenschaft*, was reprinted as recently as 2001, and his three-volume *Das Verstehen* twice in 1966 and 1984. There have also been at least fourteen posthumous translations of his works, three of these since the death of Kitagawa: *The Comparative Study of Religion* was translated into Japanese in 1999, *Sociology of Religion* appeared in Romanian in 1997, and the 1988 English translation of *Religionswissenschaft* was further translated into Turkish in 2004. Other translations include *Comparative Study of Religions* (German, 1962; Dutch, 1965; Spanish, 1967; Chinese, 1980; Korean, 1988); *Religionswissenschaft* (Japanese, 1970; Turkish, 1987; Portuguese, 1987); *Sociology of Religion* (Japanese, 1960; Polish, 1961, Portuguese 1990). An audio version for the deaf of the 1955 French translation of this latter was prepared in the 1970s. More recently, excerpts from the writings of Wach have appeared in sourcebooks on the study of religion by C. Albanese (ed., *American Spiritualities: A Reader* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001]) and R. McCutcheon (ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* [London: Cassell, 1999, and London: Continuum, 2005]).

unforeseen renaissance (or bounce on the tails of this conference and volume)—one does not expect further editions of Wach's works.

Strangely, it would seem that, even for those who knew him, admired him, and loved him, it did not take Wach's death for him to be considered "dead." For some inscrutable reason, even when he was still very much alive, Wach and his work were already considered to belong to another, bygone age. We hear narratives of this sort from two of Wach's own students. Kees Bolle, for instance, relates that a European theologian he encountered—one who figured among the "very few" who had actually read Wach's early three-volume work *Das Verstehen*—"expressed his astonishment that Wach was still alive!"[5] This was in the early 1950s, when Wach was no older than his midfifties. Joseph Kitagawa himself tells a remarkably similar tale of encountering Wach some years earlier in the mid-1940s, writing that "I thought at first that he must be the son of the Joachim Wach who had written many important books and articles in the Twenties and whose name had been so well known to me before the war, while I was still in Japan."[6] So, if today Wach's works seem anachronistic, we should realize that this is nothing new and may, indeed, be of a piece with the works themselves. As Bolle put it, "It is as if Wach became a 'classic' [defined by Sylvain Lévi as 'a work nobody reads'] much too soon."[7]

On the other hand, Wach's work was and is very much alive among those who take seriously questions of method in the human sciences in general and in the study of religion in particular. Wach devoted the greater part of his attention to the question of how best to engage in the study of religion within an academic framework. Eliade, by contrast, was little concerned with method and seems not to have been terribly devoted to academe; he merely "did his thing," driven by his idiosyncratic life project of cultural transformation through recovery of a sacred primordium.[8] So, within the ongoing conversation concerning the academic study of religion—if considered de jure rather than de facto—Wach's contribution is arguably the greater. While some of his subsidiary projects—his oddly framed sociology of religion and his theological forays into comparison—have not aged any better than Eliade's, his attempts to place the

5. Kees W. Bolle, "Wach's Legacy: Reflexions on a New Book," *History of Religions* 10, no. 1 (August 1970): 82.

6. Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The History of Religions at Chicago," in J. M. Kitagawa, *The History of Religions: Understanding Human Experience* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 133.

7. Bolle, "Wach's Legacy," 82.

8. Bolle is worth citing at length here; he writes: "Those students who stayed in Chicago after Wach's death sometimes exchanged comparisons of Wach and his successor, Professor Eliade. Years later, I heard an unfriendly critic—a philosopher—make the remark that professor Eliade's book on Yoga stopped precisely where the real issues began." He subsequently contrasts Wach's "pursuit of valid lines of demarcation in the concepts guiding and governing [the study of religion]" with Eliade's "effort to study religious symbols, myths and rites (and the same ones over and over)." See ibid., 83.

scientific study of religion on a firm footing, "to clarify and bring to methodological consciousness directions, aims, and tendencies . . . within the history of religions,"[9] remain of interest (and, perhaps, value) today. This legacy—however "classic" in the Lévian sense—has remained a vital area of study and a contested one, albeit restricted (it might be said) to cognoscenti.[10] In this sense, this volume and its contributors challenge us to reconsider the living, yet contested, legacies of Wach and Eliade, for both of whom the very real question remains of whether they can (as Wendy Doniger asks of Eliade in her introduction) "survive history."

Regarding the existence of a Chicago School encompassing both Wach and Eliade, I would argue that this notion (if not the moniker) seems to have been almost entirely the product of Joseph Kitagawa's affection for—and that it constitutes in part a memorial to—his beloved mentor Wach, preserving a place for him in the history of the school and the "discipline," lest his memory perish. Wach was evidently a very charismatic man. His presence was commanding enough that his circle of students came to adopt for themselves the name of the Buddha's merry band of disciples, the "Sangha." Robbed of their enlightened teacher so soon, so young, and so unexpectedly (and his having been replaced so immediately!),[11] Kitagawa and the other orphaned bhikṣus of the Wach Circle felt it imperative to fill the void he left with a historiographical construct: Eliade, it was averred, did not *replace* Wach, but filled his shoes, carrying on, rather than supplanting, the contribution of Wach to the history of religions. The labors of Kitagawa, Charles Long,[12] and other students of Wach in elaborating this tale of intellectual continuity were in fact a (if not *the*) crucial factor in extending the intellectual "shelf life" of Wach in the Anglophone world; for, were it not for this very conception of a Chicago School, I doubt very much that one would any longer hear of Joachim Wach, anymore than one hears of his predecessor, A. Eustace Haydon.

9. Joachim Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 4.

10. Albeit limited in scale, Wach's work has steadily attracted scholarly attention since his death. In particular—in addition to the dedicated work of Joseph Kitagawa—Kurt Rudolph (1965, 1985, 2008), Richard Scheimann (1963), Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (1972), Charles Wood (1972, 1975), Rainer Flasche (1978, 1997), Gregory Alles (1988, 2008), Eric Ziolkowski (1999, 2005), and Christoffer Grundmann (2001) have all made significant contributions to the ongoing analysis of Wach's thought and its intellectual legacy.

11. Eliade had been invited by Wach to deliver the Haskell Lectures in the 1955–56 academic year, yet by the time Eliade arrived in Hyde Park, Wach was dead. Thus finding himself accidentally the senior historian of religions in Swift Hall, Eliade forged ahead and was appointed professor the following year. (Given the difficult and often protracted process of filling such faculty positions today, however one might feel about Eliade, a contemporary Chicagoan cannot help but look back somewhat wistfully on the ease of his appointment!)

12. Long wrote an important contribution to the historiography of the "Chicago School" in which Wach is given pride of place ("Wach's appearance at Chicago marks the beginnings of systematic approaches to the study of religion"); see Charles H. Long, "A Look at the Chicago Tradition in the History of Religions: Retrospect and Future," in *The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. J. M. Kitagawa (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 91.

Regardless of the cogency of the idea of a Chicago School or the difference in their contemporary reception, however, to explore Wach and Eliade together is a desideratum in coming to grips with the scholarly contributions of these figures to the contemporary study of religion. Speaking aphoristically, it might be said that while Wach would not have been "Wach" without Eliade, Eliade could not have been "Eliade" without Wach. That is to say, had Eliade not made the history of religions program at Chicago a (scholarly) household name—and Kitagawa not linked him inseparably to Wach via the historical fiction of a Chicago School—Wach's name would no longer be much remembered or associated with the study of religion. Likewise, Eliade–qua–historian of religions would not have been possible without the curriculum and, especially, the bibliography bequeathed by Wach. One cannot understand the situation of this field in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries without understanding Eliade; nor, however, can one understand Eliade's growth upon taking up his post here in Chicago, without understanding the place that was vacated for him (albeit quite unintentionally) by Wach. Though the *illud tempus*, hierophanies, and much of the rest of the Latin and Greco-Latinate phraseology bequeathed us by Eliade was very much his own—and has certainly had its impact on research in religion—the larger framing of the field and its aims, and the vocabulary used to construct it, was almost entirely inherited from Wach. The distinctive panoply of concepts characteristic of what has been called the hermeneutical or phenomenological approach—religious experience, understanding, antireductionism (in fact, in some respects the very idea of the history of religions itself)—and, in particular for our purposes, the curriculum that was the basis for socializing scholars in the field was the legacy of Wach, communicated through his chief disciple, Kitagawa.

Eliade, for his part, seems happily to have availed himself of the pedagogical resources and cultural capital left behind by Wach. While Kitagawa claims that Wach considered Eliade "the most astute historian of religions in his time,"[13] this cannot possibly have been the case. References to Eliade in the published works and unpublished papers of Wach are extremely few and far between. Eliade as a scholar of religions was barely on the map, as far as Wach was concerned. Nor was he a terribly commanding presence in scholarly circles more generally. He had virtually no experience in teaching students and practically no academic platform for his musings. Nor, interestingly, does the term history of religions, or (*Allgemeine*) *Religionswissenschaft*, appear very prominently in Eliade's writings—or, when it does, it bears little theoretical weight—until

13. Kitagawa, "History of Religions in Chicago," 143.

after his move to Chicago.[14] Rather, Eliade clearly took full advantage of the prestige of the Chicago position and the resources bequeathed him there to become the person he is known as today; in the process, he adopted (and adapted) a new argot (the liberal Protestant, "phenomenological" lingo derived from Otto and van der Leeuw) as well as a bibliography[15] that was the coin of the realm in his new domicile.

The panelists whose work is included in this volume offer new perspectives on important and overlooked aspects of the development of the field in the last century, highlighting the formative influences that conditioned Wach and Eliade, the ways in which they carried the field forward through their own distinctive contributions, and the problems they left behind for those of us who follow. Their interpretations of these scholars are not beholden to the fiction of a Chicago School. Indeed, for the most part our authors approach the work of Wach and Eliade as largely unrelated, both historically and conceptually. In so doing they work to liberate the scholarly understanding of Wach in the Anglophone world from the heretofore dominant historiography of Joseph Kitagawa.[16]

The first two contributions to this volume do much to enable such a reassessment of Wach—one that does not fetishize him as a great mentor and school founder but rather recognizes his role as merely one participant (though, granted, a learned and idiosyncratic one) in larger scholarly and proto–New Age romantic movements in early twentieth-century Germany. Each, in its own way, carries forward the insight of Rainer Flasche[17] that Wach's early

14. I do not mean to claim that such a framing was entirely absent from Eliade's work: it clearly was not. But a Wachean lingo takes on a much greater density in his writings after his move to Hyde Park. Consider the difference in tone between *Traité d'histoire des religions* (1949), in which, for example, Otto and van der Leeuw are cited only insofar as Eliade can cherry-pick *exemplaria* from them, and *Das Heilege und das Profane* (1957), wherein the entire discussion is framed in reference to Otto and to which Eliade appended an "encyclopedia entry" (*enzyklopädisches Stichwort*) entitled "History of the Science of Religions" (*Geschichte der Religionswissenschaft*).

15. A tremendous amount of the material preserved in the Wach archives in Regenstein Library consists of extensive bibliographical notes, written in Wach's distinctive, somewhat cramped hand (indeed, even the end papers and most other free space in Wach's personal copy of his *Sociology of Religion* are entirely filled with such notes). This is perhaps appropriate, since it would appear that foremost among Wach's legacies to the field is his distinctive bibliography. In particular, I would argue, such problematical works as Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* and Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* have been taken as significant contributions to the scientific study of religion—required reading on doctoral exam lists—largely through the influence of Wach and his votaries.

16. Kitagawa's perspectives seem not to have been very influential in Germanic scholarly circles, where Wach's legacy has continued to be appreciated in relationship to the predecessors he engaged with, rather than the successor he never met. Thus, the work of Flasche and Rudolph—and (herein) Kippenberg, Wasserstrom, and Alles—foregrounds his early hermeneutics, and his relationship to George, Weber, and other compatriots. Avenues of research that run contra to the Kitagawan, however, are not plentiful, and egress has been limited by Kitagawa himself: some of the most important archival sources for such a project—the personal and academic papers of Wach preserved in the Regenstein archives—are quite meager by comparison to most, and one cannot help but suspect that a rather heavy curatorial hand was at work in selecting and arranging these.

17. See Rainer Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978).

involvement with the circle around Stefan George was an essential formative influence in his work and life; yet each also refines Flasche's representation of Wach's relationship to George and his *Kreis* in significant ways.

Hans Kippenberg's "Joachim Wach between the George Circle and Weber's Typology of Religious Communities" was one of the two plenary sessions of the conference (the other being Carlo Ginzburg's chapter on Eliade, which closes this volume). Kippenberg takes as his starting point the differing contexts within which Wach's thought has been interpreted: soon after his death, Wach's student Hans-Joachim Schoeps identified Weber as a key interlocutor, yet, years later, it was the George Circle that provided the ideological background for the interpretation of Rainer Flasche. Kippenberg's analysis lucidly demonstrates the ambiguous relationship of Wach and his thinking on religion and culture to these two influential intellectual circles in early twentieth-century Germany. By highlighting the ambivalent location of Wach's thought at the interstices of these two potent movements, Kippenberg's work serves as a welcome corrective to a too-easy assimilation of Wach's thought to that of George and allows a more nuanced appreciation of Schoeps's assessment of his teacher. One remarkable, if ancillary, contribution of this essay is its demonstration of the curious fact that, by a tortuous series of circumstances, an essay on Stefan George was included in a posthumously published collection of Wach's essays, although the piece in question was in fact the translation of a Dutch eulogy by Gerardus van der Leeuw.[18] This is an important step in rectifying the bibliography of Wach, and yet the ease with which such an error could have occurred is noteworthy, given the esteem in which Wach held both George and van der Leeuw.

Steven Wasserstrom's "The Master-Interpreter: Notes on the German Career of Joachim Wach (1922–1935)" similarly focuses on Wach's formative experiences in Germany and his relationship to the George Circle. While his analysis contributes to the argument for a deep and formative influence of Georgian thought on Wach, Wasserstrom's approach to this material differs from previous studies in important ways. Rather than foreground the resonances of George's views on the poetic and artistic in Wach's oeuvre, Wasserstrom explores the challenging topic of Georgian homosociality in Wach's life and scholarship. To my knowledge, this is the first scholarly study to confront

18. This is the essay "Stefan George: Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism," in *Understanding and Believing: Essays by Joachim Wach*, ed. J. M. Kitagawa (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 11–29. Notably, in the paper circulated to the participants in our conference, Steven Wasserstrom relied on this very essay in establishing Wach's intimate relationship to the George Circle. Though this relationship is so well established via other sources that Wasserstrom's argument is in no way affected, Kippenberg's discovery will require future scholars to treat this source differently than they have to date.

directly Wach's closeted homosexuality (and its homosocial cultural iterations) in relation to his scholarly work.[19] In all, a compelling case is made that Wach's work is not fully comprehensible without the interpretative key provided by this aspect of the richly textured cultural semiotics of the period—a semiotics, it is argued, that Wach carried over into the formation of his own *Kreis*, the aforementioned Hyde Park Sangha.

Both Kippenberg's and Wasserstrom's chapters are provocative and essential contributions to the interpretation of Wach and are especially valuable in the Anglophone context. The works of Wach's later period can too easily be misconstrued by reading them only against his contemporaneous writings in English or, worse, by later English translations of his earlier German works. Wasserstrom highlights one prime example of this: "Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies" (1962),[20] which excluded the bulk of the notes found in the original *Meister und Jünger: zwei religionssoziologische Betrachtungen* (1925)—thereby domesticating its thought for 1960s "religious studies" audiences by eliminating its Georgeanism and "sacralizing" its sociology of religion. Rather, both chapters demonstrate the extent to which Wach and his thought is through and through informed by the specific cultural world of the early twentieth-century Germany of his youth.

In "After the Naming Explosion: Joachim Wach's Unfinished Project," Gregory Alles takes a somewhat different approach to the Wach archive than the preceding chapters, insofar as he integrates a more purely methodological perspective with that provided by the lenses of the history of ideas. Like Kippenberg, Alles stresses the important affinities between the thought of Wach and Weber—affinities camouflaged by Wach's vocal rejection of aspects of Weberian sociology—and, like both the preceding authors, contributes to tracing currents in Wach's thinking to the conditioning of his early social milieu as a cultured German bourgeois. Alles proceeds to trace Wach's interest in typologies to a very specific historical instance of a perennial challenge of scientific research—and he does so in a thoroughly scientific, and contemporary, vocabulary.

Alles interprets Wach's typological thinking as an attempt to struggle with a fulcrum issue in the study of religions: How does a scholar give due diligence both to a historically responsible attention to local detail—an impulse that inclines toward proper nouns—and to an intellectual perspective that engages

19. Interestingly, Flasche refers to Wach's "celibacy" (*Ehelosigkeit*) as consonant with the "vital principle" (*Lebensprinzipien*) of the George Circle. See Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs*, 14n6.

20. Joachim Wach, "Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies," trans. Susanne Heigl-Wach and Frederick Streng, *Journal of Religion* 42, no. 1 (January 1962): 1–21.

broader concerns in the human sciences, employing a vocabulary of more general terms or types? Alles stresses that this challenge was particularly acute during the birth of the scientific study of religions. Having taken root during the height of the period in which colonialism and the Oriental Renaissance were expanding the range of European knowledge, the science of religion was confronted thereby with data of ever-increasing complexity and geographic and temporal breadth.[21] Wach's approach to this problem is explored in light of contemporary scientific discussions of category formation, probing the strengths and weaknesses of his approach to the postulation of types. This leads to a larger discussion of the utility of the category "religion" (as a prime example of such a type) for scientific scholarship, and the implications of this for contemporary research—implications that may well sound a death knell for "Wach's unfinished project" (at least as conceived by Wach), but which promise ongoing and rich inquiries within the field of religion in the future, vicariously "finishing" Wach's project through the medium of our own, very different, researches.

In "Wach, Radhakrishnan, and Relativism," Charles Preston engages another major aspect of Wach's work—one especially characteristic of his Chicago period, in which it had grown (perhaps under the influence of the History of Religions Area's new home in the Divinity School and the community provided by the newly formed Federated Theological Faculty) in a more unabashedly theological direction.[22] Preston's work sheds new light on a rather sharp debate that raged between the inclusivist religious philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and an increasingly religiously conservative Joachim Wach, determined to preserve the claims of Christian exclusivism within the liberal Protestant umbrella of the study of religion. In advancing his argument, Preston draws creatively on materials preserved in the Wach archives, including lecture notes that demonstrate how his typologies of religious figures served

21. Indeed, Louis Henry Jordan, an early lecturer on comparative religion at the University of Chicago, attributes what he considers the "tardy genesis" of the science of religions to "an obstacle in the scantiness of adequate working material"—which lacuna had been rectified precisely by European imperialism. See L. H. Jordan, *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), 111–14.

22. Until Wach's arrival in Hyde Park, what was then called Comparative Religion was located (as the Department of New Testament and Early Christian Literature still is) in a separate department in the Division of the Humanities. Wach's arrival coincided with a decision to make this department (rechristened "History of Religions") an area of study within the Divinity School. Not long afterward, the Federated Theological Faculty was formed, including the Divinity School, Disciples Divinity House, Chicago Theological Seminary, and Meadville Theological School. Thus, Wach himself not only represents but also presided over the institutional transformation that resulted in the situation (not unique to Chicago, but curious) of confessional and scientific scholarship working in concert in one institution. Wach's own theological training, and the deep conditioning of his thought and work by theological thinkers such as Troeltsch, Otto, and Heiler, facilitated this transformation and (for better or worse) left a strong impress on the nature of the subject as practiced at the University of Chicago in the twentieth century.

his polemical purposes in allowing him to cast Radhakrishnan as a reformer and a modernist. His conclusion brings this historical argument about relativism into the ever-shifting present by placing it in dialogue with more contemporary observations on relativism by Geertz and Obeyesekere.

What perhaps most strikingly characterizes the development of the history of religions from its very roots—whether one trace those to F. Max Müller or C. P. Tiele—is that "history of religions" has functioned as a kind of floating signifier: a signifier in search of a signified or, more precisely, a signifier whose signified was and remains hotly contested. Due to a combination of intellectual reasons, ideological formations, and contingent historical circumstances, in the late twentieth century the field was dominated by the discourses—to which Wach and Eliade each gave tremendous momentum—of phenomenological or hermeneutical approaches. In more recent years, it may be fair to say, this movement has become moribund: *le roi est mort*.[23] However, the demise of phenomenology—of the Chicago School, if you will—was not occasioned by its usurpation by another: there is as yet no alternative to whom we might without qualification avow *vive le roi*. This is not necessarily a problem, however. For some, the study of religion today is precisely attractive because of its intellectual indeterminacy or, to give it a more respectable moniker, its "interdisciplinarity." Though there are those who demur, one need feel no great sense of loss or alarm in contemplating the indeterminate plenitude—the *śūnyatā,* if you will—at the heart of the field. Whatever one's perspective on this situation, in cogitating on this empty space, experiencing it, inhabiting it, and (perhaps) taking possession of the unfilled void left in the study of religion by the decline and fall of their phenomenological empire, one cannot but be aided immensely by the close, careful, sympathetic, yet critical assessment of the journeys of our predecessors.

Indeed, in confronting the challenges posed in grappling with the past and the present of the history of religions, this conference and this volume are in no way irredeemably alienated from those who have gone before—however divergent may be our central concerns. For this conversation has—or may be construed as having—a prehistory.[24] By a coincidence noticed only after planning had begun, this conference and this volume take their place as only the latest in a series of such self-reflective moments in the history of the Divinity School and of the History of Religions Area. The first conference was convened exactly forty years prior to our own, in 1966, to reflect on issues of method in the field, and produced a volume of essays entitled *The History of Religions: Essays on*

23. Ou, du moins, presque mort (moribond).
24. Notably, an ideological move quite common in religious history itself.

*the Problem of Understanding*[25]—a volume, it is worth noting, dedicated to Wach and Tillich. The second conference was convened roughly two decades later, in 1983, shortly before the death of Eliade. Its program featured further reflection on the state of the field and began the process of reflecting on and constructing a history around the important role played by the University of Chicago in its development in the twentieth century. This seminar also produced a volume, entitled *The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect*.[26] Adopting this perspective, the "Hermeneutics in History" conference and the volume before you are the third in an ongoing series dedicated to reassessing the field at twenty-year intervals. Given the impact of these great Chicagoans and the major shifts in method and perspective that have taken place in the field since the last such conference, we are pleased to present here the insights offered by this outstanding group of leading scholars and practitioners of the history of religions, reflecting in concert on the impact of Wach and Eliade and acknowledging their signal significance for contemporary work on religion as we look forward with eager anticipation to the next twenty years of research.

25. Joseph M. Kitagawa, with Mircea Eliade and Charles H. Long, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

26. Joseph M. Kitagawa, ed., *The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

# Introduction II: Life and Art, or Politics and Religion, in the Writings of Mircea Eliade

*Wendy Doniger*

So much has been written about Mircea Eliade, a great deal of it by Mircea Eliade, that the reader might think that what the planet earth needed least would be another book about him. But this assumption would be mistaken. A great deal of new information—some the result of newly published papers of Eliade, particularly but not only the Portuguese diaries, and some the result of inspired academic research into already existing but previously restricted archives—has come to light in the past decade, and new ideas have entirely changed our understanding of the sources that we thought we knew. The centenary of his birth in 2007 coincided with the flare-up of new interest in him, inspired in part by a film that Francis Ford Coppola made of one of Eliade's most autobiographical works of fiction, *Youth without Youth,* in which the hero worries, among other things, that someone might mistake him for a member of the Iron Guard. It seems time for a reassessment.

The chapters in this collection, by leading scholars in America and Europe, several of them Romanian (Calinescu, Turcanu, and Idel), also provide numerous new translations from Romanian sources previously unavailable in English. The chapters range so widely over this new material that it would be impossible to summarize them. But it might be useful to highlight a basic tension between them on one central issue, the relationship between Eliade's politics and his writings in three fields—scholarship, fiction, and memoirs—which frequently leak into one another. Equally permeable is the

membrane that separated his life and his work. To take one example used, in very different ways, by three of the authors in this volume (Calinescu, Ginzburg, and Turcanu), Eliade's perception of the marginality of Romania in the political and cultural world was one of the factors that inspired in him a hope of establishing the academic discipline of the history of religions—with, in his formulation, its new valuation of cultures still strongly linked to their primitive roots, cultures epitomized, also in his formulation, by Romania.

I find it useful to divide these chapters into two basic groups, the first concentrating on his written oeuvre, often but not always reconsidering it in the light of his political views (these are the chapters of Calinescu, Dubuisson, Faivre, Idel, Rennie, and Smith) and the second focusing on his political views, demonstrating their relevance to his written oeuvre (the chapters by Turcanu, Fisher, Mocko, and Ginzburg). Let me recapitulate the points that they make individually and as an ensemble, beginning first with the six chapters that emphasize the literary over the political.

In "Eliade and Ionesco in the Post–World War II Years: Questions of Identity in Exile," Matei Calinescu argues that Eliade saw himself as a Romanian scholar and writer in exile, in contrast with Ionesco, who adopted a French linguistic and literary identity. Ionesco, an adversary of the Romanian extreme right-wing movement of the Iron Guard, at first regarded Eliade as an ideological enemy, for Eliade had "serious and self-deluded" ties with the Iron Guard. The explicit published traces of this engagement are few (we will see other scholars in this volume ferret out many more implicit traces in his later writings), and they stopped in 1938 (in part with the aid of the censorship introduced by the dictatorship of King Carol II, an opponent of the Legionary movement), nor did Eliade ever talk about this connection. But when he later appeared to regret his political past (although not publicly), Ionesco "forgave" him, and the two became friends.

Daniel Dubuisson, in "The Poetical and Rhetorical Structure of the Eliadean Text: A Contribution to Critical Theory and Discourses on Religions," examines the rhetorical and poetic processes that Eliade used as a vehicle for his ideas and demonstrates that these processes present a certain number of "typical" traits, basic topoi and arguments that he took from all the "perennialists" and all the "religionists." These recur from one book to another, reveal the existence of a coherent, global project, and are indissociable both from one another and from the ideology they convey. But because the Eliadean text is condemned indefinitely to repeat its own postulates and, in so doing, to paraphrase itself, even to quote itself, it cannot put any critical distance between itself and the world, because the real world is kept apart from its universe of "fallacies." Moreover, the Eliadean text lacks (1) any enunciation mark referring

to a particular historical context, and "thick description"; (2) any form of modality, since it knows only categorical assertions; and (3) any form of metalinguistic reference that might introduce an element of reflexivity, and thus critical distancing. Yet Eliade's greatest originality was perhaps that he brought in examples from primitive and Oriental civilizations. And with his ability to popularize, Eliade was bold enough to build bridges between academic culture, the Orient, the primitives, and prehistory, though never forgetting the "spiritual" preoccupations of his readers.

In "Modern Western Esoteric Currents in the Work of Mircea Eliade: The Extent and Limits of Their Presence," Antoine Faivre examines the place in Eliade's historical works of a variety of currents that bear a family resemblance and have flourished in the Western world since the early modern period (from the end of the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries): Christian Kabbalah, neo-Alexandrian hermetism, Renaissance "magic," "spiritual" alchemy, Paracelsian and neo-Paracelsian forms of philosophy of nature, Theosophy (Jacob Böhme and his followers), Rosicrucian literature and associations, and the so-called Occultist current. Eliade's reasons for emphasizing certain ones among these, in both his fictional and scholarly publications, are primarily linked to the fact that a "philosophy of nature" clearly present in most of these currents did not really tally with his idea of what the essentials of "religion" are or should be all about. Partly due to the fact that they mainly consist in a series of speculative discourses permeated by a sense of historicity, they were uncongenial to the program of transhistorical religious anthropology that he had set himself to develop.

Moshe Idel, in "The Camouflaged Sacred in Mircea Eliade's Self-Perception, Literature, and Scholarship," argues that this concept informs Eliade's creative imagination. His diverse types of writings—religious, political, historical, literary, or personal—reveal the same underlying assumption that the sacred camouflages itself within the profane and is therefore largely unrecognizable, and that, in order to reach a higher form of existence, one must be able to recognize its revelations, which are sometimes expressed by signs. The two most central factors of his life, the Romanian and the Hindu experiences (and his acquaintance with their cultures), were the determinant factors in his thought and literature, as well as in his self-awareness; a third major source of inspiration was the Florentine Renaissance and its reverberations in the European occult, among people like René Guenon and Julius Evola. This emphasis on these three topics as formative for Eliade's worldviews means that two other intellectual factors in Eliade's life, his more formal adherence to the Iron Guard in 1937 and his prolonged participation in the Eranos encounters at Ascona since 1950, should be seen as less formative from the intellectual point of view, as

their impact on Eliade's writings can only rarely be established through strict historical and philological tools. The first factor, his association with the Iron Guard, was relatively short, while the second, the Eranos meetings, was relatively late in his career; it is difficult to pinpoint precise sources and ideas that impacted upon Eliade's thought from either of these events. The impact of the three other sources (Romanian, Hindu, and Renaissance), by comparison, was quite obvious and profound. This does not mean that the Iron Guard and Eranos should be ignored or neglected in scholarship but only that a careful inspection of the possible impact of more concrete literary sources should determine the relevance or the depth of the impact of those events. Eliade's actual biography did not serve as a major blueprint for his literary works or for the theories about the camouflaged sacred that he introduced in his academic writings. But the way in which Eliade imagined the meaning of his life did so.

Bryan Rennie, in "The Influence of Eastern Orthodox Christian Theology on Mircea Eliade's Understanding of Religion," traces specific correlations between Eliade's analysis of religion and the influence of his Romanian Orthodox background, concluding that Eliade was neither particularly unusual nor entirely unwarranted in his secular reconstruction of his traditional religious background. Orthodox theology imposed on Eliade no dogmatic assumptions about the nature of the real/sacred, but that church influenced him through its power as a multimedia performative theater capable of inducing, via narrative and visual representations of traditional forms, potentially transformative experiences. This could easily have alerted and sensitized the young Eliade to the potential of such representation as an experience that can influence its hearers so as to induce their apprehension of (that is, to "reveal") the "real," the "sacred" in historical data (or *what is considered*—or more accurately what is *apprehended*—as the real/sacred.)

Jonathan Z. Smith, in "The Eternal Deferral," asks whether the "companion volume" that Eliade promised in *Patterns* can be identified with "the awkward, multi-volume, unfinished production of Eliade's last years," *A History of Religious Ideas*. Eliade thought it so, *or came to think it so*. The *History* functions, and will continue to function, in a way analogous to an encyclopedia, providing, in both its text and its bibliographies, a valuable starting point for further inquiries, one that is provocative of both thought and questions. But despite Eliade's identification of the *History* with the "companion volume," whether that judgment was prospective or retrospective, and the realization that the *History* stands in a close relation to *Patterns* in several significant ways, it still does *not* fulfill the agendum of the promised "companion volume." While it provides minimal historical contextualization, it fails to reflect explicitly on the relations between the morphological approach, as exemplified in *Patterns*, and

a historical approach, as illustrated by the *History*. In part, this is due to the lack of the concluding volume to the *History*, Eliade's growing problems with his health, and, finally, his death, but it is also due to the inadequate conceptualization of the historical embodied in the work.

Now let us shift the weight of inquiry to the political, and its relevance for our understanding of Eliade's literary legacy.

Florin Turcanu, in "Southeast Europe and the Idea of the History of Religions in Mircea Eliade," locates between the middle 1930s and the publication, in 1961, of the article "History of Religions and a New Humanism" the essential period during which Eliade crystallized, enriched, and redefined his conception of the history of religions. Several stages and moments emerge as landmarks in this process during which Eliade's thought opened up to various influences while at the same time striving to define, once and for all, the particularity of his own approach in relation to different intellectual traditions. One of the aspects of this thought that was to give birth to a distinct theme in Eliade's writings concerned southeast Europe as a privileged space of folklore, of prehistoric survivals, and of contact between the Orient and the Occident. For Eliade, a primary theoretical vision of the connection between folkloric sources and the history of religions validated mythic time over historic time, the pre-Christian religious heritage over Christianity, the history of religions over historiography, Asia over Europe, and oral sources over written. This vision was formulated on the margins of his analysis of the various Balkan folkloric themes and the cultural ties, since prehistory, between the Balkans and Asia. And, as Eliade wrote, "if the new disciplines are definitively established in European culture, the value of those nations that have a proto-history will be recognized, not of those that have a medieval history." That is, in the political world, prehistory, protohistory, and the folkloric heritage make up together the Balkans' entry card into a new universal history, different than the one from which the region had been excluded by historicism. In the world of academia, it supported Eliade's hope of establishing the history of religions as an academic discipline.

Elaine Fisher, in "Fascist Scholars, Fascist Scholarship: The Quest for Ur-Fascism and the Study of Religion," argues that, by translating the theology of a "secret message" into methodology, Eliade imported in the academic discipline of the history of religions a number of problematic assumptions about the nature of religion as a well-formed object of scholarly inquiry. Despite Eliade's own statement to the contrary, a number of his critics persist in reading Eliade's "secret message" not as a theological overture but as a covert political call to action. But Eliade's critics employ a number of problematic maneuvers in order to correlate mythocentric and sui generis theories of religion

systematically and intrinsically with Fascist politics; there is considerable rhetorical slippage in these critiques, such as the wholesale mapping of Fascist philosophy and political theory onto Eliade's scholarship on the basis of a limited number of associations, and the essentialization and unification of a certain body of discourse, concerned with mythology or religion as such, under the rubric of Fascism because of a genealogical connection to the discursive field of early twentieth-century Europe.

In "Tracing the Red Thread: Anti-Communist Themes in the Work of Mircea Eliade," Anne Mocko examines a variety of Eliadean materials—academic books, personal journals, fiction, prewar journalistic essays—reading not for anti-Semitism or crypto-Fascism but for an opposition to Communism. Eliade nowhere lays out an explicit political philosophy, but he does make a very substantial number of references to the limitations and dangers of Communism, scattered across his work. Assembling these fragmentary discussions reveals their patterns, and the resulting picture—though piecemeal, complex, and sometimes quite variable—demonstrates that Eliade's opposition to Communism is a combination of two generally independent strains of his work: first, an opposition to the theory of Marxism (a theme generally developed in his academic and private writing) and, second, an opposition to actual police states, especially Communist and particularly in Romania (a theme generally developed in his fiction). Additionally, however, Eliade's opposition to Communism turns out to be the central focus of a broader opposition to authoritarian governments regardless of ideological orientation. This is clear from a number of references in which he equates Communism and Fascism, and also from the manner in which his journalistic writings of the 1930s evaluate the Nazi movement.

Carlo Ginzburg's chapter, "Mircea Eliade's Ambivalent Legacy," was one of two keynote lectures of the conference at which these papers were presented, and we will let him have the last word here. The debate about Eliade's political attitudes has deeply (and inevitably) affected the debate on Eliade's scholarly work—sometimes at the risk of simplifying a highly complex issue. Ginzburg argues (1) that a relationship between Eliade's interpretive categories and his political attitudes did indeed exist; (2) that the specific forms of that relationship were far from obvious; and (3) that the reception, either actual or potential, of Eliade's work is not necessarily linked either to the context in which it was produced or to its ideological implications.

Eliade suggested that Romanian history, following the example of Eurasia, could be raised to the level of Western history only through a comparison based on myths. The context in which Eliade began to write *The Myth of the Eternal Return* cannot entirely explain the meaning of the book; but in this case, as in

many others, personal and public elements, as well as subjective drives and objective constraints, interacted—and sometimes reinforced each other.

In a diary entry on January 28, 1943, Eliade expresses his distress over Stalingrad ("I feel the agony, painfully, of those who are in Stalingrad, the agony of Europe") but then remarks on "the most tragic farce in the history of the world: the Red murderers (who trump the other political murderers, by acting on a huge scale, on the scale of millions) are awaited as the liberators of Europe." Now Eliade referred to Eurasia not as the domain of myth but as the symbol of political mass murder. In the resistance of Europe—Hitler's Europe—to Stalin's Eurasia, Eliade realized that Stalingrad was the beginning of a historic defeat that would affect him too, sooner or later. And in March 1945, he began to write *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.

Ginzburg concludes that Eliade's work does not help us to understand the largely enchanted, or re-enchanted, world we live in. In order to understand religious phenomena—in fact, all historical phenomena—we need critical distance, not tautologies. Yet critical distance is (or has become) a contentious notion; ambivalence is part of a larger context, in which Left, Right, Enlightenment, and anti-Enlightenment clash, crisscross, and overlap on specific issues. The age of simple dichotomies is over.

Let me conclude on a personal note on the relationship between Eliade's life and his work. His library in his office in the Meadville Lombard Theological School was destroyed by fire on December 19, 1985, a few months before his death. I wrote about this right after it happened:

> When I asked Eliade why he was so saddened by the burning of the books from his library, since most of it consisted of copies of the books that he himself had written, books that were still in print and therefore could be replaced, he told me that they were specially annotated copies: after their initial publication, he had kept making notes in his copies of them, keeping the books alive, up to date, changing them to fix and correct their errors, to add new thoughts that he had continued to have on those subjects and to expand the bibliographies when other scholars continued to publish related works, often in response to those very books of his. In doing this, Eliade was keeping the books in history, as it were, keeping them alive and changing. And when those books were burnt, he felt that all the years of continued growth had been erased. The books that he had dragged forward with him into the future were, overnight, transported back in time to the moment at which they were published. The books had, in a very real sense, returned to their

> origins, to the moment of their birth; and this was not what he had wanted. The immortality that he had sought on the printed page was subject to material destruction, just like the immortality that he had once, long ago, sought in his experiments with yoga.[1]

As usual, Eliade was fighting against history, even when he thought he was preserving it. More precisely, he was fighting against time and its inevitable destructiveness, fighting for immortality. Did his books in fact die forever in that fire? Or have they continued to live and grow in the imagination of those who read them? The passion with which the scholars in this volume, and elsewhere, have argued for and against them is, I think, evidence that his ideas did indeed survive the fire. They continue to work particularly in the broader world beyond religious studies, as is evident from this recent tribute by the Nobel Prize laureate Seamus Heaney:

> I discovered his book on sacred and profane space in the early eighties. . . . The desacralizing of space is something that my generation experienced in all kinds of ways. . . . At the same time, I have memories of the world-marking power of a dividing line, such as the first furrow ploughed in a field, or the laying out of house foundations, or even the marking of a pitch for football. Not to mention a deeply ingrained notion of "sanctuary" in the space behind the altar rails; always conscious too of the boundary between the graveyard and the road; and so on. Eliade's book gave all those disparate awarenesses a credible frame of reference; he helped you to see the accidentals of your autobiography and environment as symptomatic of spiritual changes in your world. So that gives him a definite importance.[2]

But the judgment of so many of his critics—again in this volume, and elsewhere—is evidence that Eliade himself did not survive history, as no one can; that history cast its shadow over his work, as over his life, in ways that he was never willing to admit. In the final reckoning, the works will have to be judged for what they illuminate and obscure in our understanding of the world, whatever the personal and political influences on their creation may have been.

1. Wendy Doniger, epilogue to *Mircea Eliade: Journal IV (1979–1985)*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 151–52.

2. Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 309.

# PART I

# Joachim Wach

*Contexts, Categories, and Controversy*

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# 1

# Joachim Wach between the George Circle and Weber's Typology of Religious Communities

*Hans G. Kippenberg*

To call Joachim Wach (1898–1955) one of the founding fathers of religious studies seems strange. His works are not reprinted; Amazon.com gives links to secondhand booksellers that offer them for a suspiciously low price; and none today would advocate his peculiar notion of the sociology of religion, strictly separated from sociology and surrendered to religious studies. In addition to the symptoms of a fading scholarly legacy, uncertainty exists regarding his precise place in the history of the discipline. Wach, who descended from a German-Jewish family, was forced to leave his country in 1935 and died twenty years later while serving as professor of the history of religions at the University of Chicago.[1] In an obituary, Hans-Joachim Schoeps, a student of Wach during his time at the University of Leipzig, recalled him as a scholar most strongly influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber, but also by Ernst Troeltsch, Georg Simmel, and Rudolf Otto.[2] Wach's social typology of religious communities, Schoeps added, was directed critically against

1. For Wach's academic career, see Joseph M. Kitagawa, introduction to his *Comparative Study of Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Kurt Rudolph, "Joachim Wach (1898–1955)," in Rudolph, *Geschichte und Probleme der Religionswissenschaft* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 357–67; Christoffer Grundmann, "Einleitung" to Joachim Wach, *Religionswissenschaft: Prolegomena zu ihrer wissenschaftstheoretischen Grundlegung* (reprint, Waltrop: Spenner, 2001), 1–20.

2. Hans Joachim Schoeps, "Joachim Wachs wissenschaftliche Bedeutung," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 9 (1957): 368–71.

Weber, who emphasized a historical trend of rationalization and disenchantment in religious history.

Twenty years later, Rainer Flasche in his thesis *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs* depicted a completely different intellectual context. According to Flasche, "George and his circle are Wach's 'religious' frame of reference. Here are the roots of his religious identity [*Selbstverständnis*], of his understanding of religiosity in general—at least in the first period of his life."[3] Thus the contemporary interpreter is faced with two Wachs: one under the spell of Weber (as per Schoeps in 1957) and another under George (as Flasche proposed in 1978). These diverging views deserve clarification and explanation.

## The Essay "Stefan George: Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism"

One reason for Flasche's correction rests in a paper that was published in the interim in 1968. A previously unknown article found among Wach's papers shed new and unexpected light on an early stage of his intellectual career. Joachim Wach in his German period had been an admirer of Stefan George. As a student in Heidelberg in 1922–23 he personally became acquainted with a major figure of that circle: Friedrich Gundolf, professor of literature.[4] As Privatdozent in Leipzig, Wach, together with younger friends, read poems by George. Wach was a distant admirer. There were no listed members of the George Circle; only George alone knew his true disciples, probably altogether eighty-five persons, between twenty and forty at the same time.[5] Because literature and art were at the center of the association and determined its character,[6] the circle expanded beyond small numbers and geographic confines. Admirers and disciples of George were all over the place in Germany. Wach was one of them.

When Joseph Kitagawa edited *Understanding and Believing: Essays by Joachim Wach*, he included a previously unpublished essay, "Stefan George: Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism."[7] In his introduction, he gave some information about it: "The essay on 'Stefan George: Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism' was found after Wach's death in one of his files, marked for publication. As

3. Rainer Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), 77 (my translation).

4. See the rich and comprehensive study on the George Circle by Stefan Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus und der deutsche Antimodernismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995). Wach is not mentioned.

5. Rainer Kolk, *Literarische Gruppenbildung am Beispiel des George-Kreises 1890–1945* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 173–74.

6. Ibid., 108–23.

7. Joachim Wach, *Understanding and Believing: Essays by Joachim Wach*, edited with an introduction by Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 11–29.

yet we have not been able to verify whether it has been actually published. If it has been published elsewhere and has escaped our attention, we beg forgiveness of its publisher." After indicating the sources for the English translations of some of George's poems, he expressed "gratitude to Miss Nancy E. Auer for clarifying some of the author's expressions."[8]

I met Nancy E. Falk (née Auer) at the "Hermeneutics in History" conference in Chicago. She worked (she told me) as a translator for the Divinity School of the University of Chicago between 1963 and 1965. At that time, Joseph Kitagawa started the task of trying to put in order and publish Wach's papers. Falk remembers:

> One day he brought me the essay on George. It was written in English, but, as I recall, it had cited in German only several passages from George's poetry. I tried to translate the poetry, but it was well beyond me. . . . I do recall tracking down existing translations of George's poetry . . . I do vaguely remember the manuscript . . . it was typed on lightweight paper; it may have been a carbon copy rather than an original typescript. . . . He [Kitagawa] certainly never gave any indication to me that he had any doubts whatsoever about its provenance.[9]

## Van der Leeuw's in Memoriam of Stefan George Wrongly Attributed to Joachim Wach

In 1989 a conference at the University of Groningen in commemoration of the centenary of van der Leeuw's birth engaged "The History of Religions and Critique of Culture in the Days of Gerardus van der Leeuw." One of the aims of the conference was a different approach to the work of van der Leeuw.[10] Gerardus van der Leeuw is an internationally well-known, if controversial, scholar of religion, in particular due to his *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology* as well as his *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*.[11] He is much less well known abroad as an author of popular essays and lectures in the Netherlands reflecting critically on crucial issues of the culture of his days. When reading them,

8. Joseph M. Kitagawa, introduction, in *Understanding and Believing*, xiv–xv.

9. Nancy E. Falk, e-mail message to author, November 6, 2006.

10. The proceedings were published as Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi, eds., *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik* (Marburg: Diagonal Verlag, 1991).

11. Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*, trans. John Evan Turner (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), published first in German as *Phänomenologie der Religion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933); and *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), published first in German as *Vom Heiligen in der Kunst* (Guetersloh: Carl Bertelsmann, 1957).

one discovers an intellectual who was deeply concerned about the impact the rise of modernity has had on human culture. Van der Leeuw witnessed the rise of industrialization, bureaucracy, and the natural sciences during his life (1890–1950) and considered them a serious threat to a genuine human existence. With this concern in mind, after the death of Stefan George, van der Leeuw wrote an obituary in Dutch in the journal *Stemmen des Tijds* (1934), included later in his book *Levensvormen*, published in Amsterdam in 1948.[12]

It was this essay that Kitagawa included in the collection of Wach's papers. The translator of the essay must have known better, since he replaced the words "in our country" (referring to the author's school days) with "in the Netherlands."

> Ik herinner mij levendig hoe ik nog op het gymnasium voor het eerst een bundel van George in handen kreeg. *Albert Verwey*, zijn vriend en medestrijder voor een nieuwe dichterlijke cultuur, had hem en de zijnen *in ons land* bekend gemaakt voor men *in Duitsland* nog op hem lette.[13]
>
> I very vividly remember how, when I was attending the Gymnasium, a book from George fell into my hands for the first time. Albert Verwey, George's friend and companion in the titanic struggle to attain a new practical [*sic*; in Dutch "poetical"] culture, had made George known *in the Netherlands* even before anyone noticed him in Germany.[14]

Besides the italicized modification, the English text is a literal translation of van der Leeuw's essay in the *Levensvormen*, as an omission of two sentences of the first publication shows.[15] That a paper of van der Leeuw was found among the

12. Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Stefan George (1868–1933)," *Stemmen des Tijds* 23 (1934): 302–20, reprinted in Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Levensvormen* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1948), 239–57.

13. Van der Leeuw, *Stemmen des Tijds*, 302. Dr. Willem Hofstee was so kind to send me a copy of the article.

14. [Van der Leeuw], "Stefan George: Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism," in *Understanding and Believing*, 11.

15. The omission concerns two sentences in the version of 1934: "Men heeft de vraag gestelt of *George*, wiens laatste bundel den naam *Das neue Reich* draagt, inderdaad een voorloper is geweest van het 'derde rijk,' dat thans in Duischland [*sic*] bestaat." The following two sentences are omitted in the *Levensvormen* of 1948: "Bekend is dat *Hitler*, toen door het ontslag van vele dichters en schrijvers in de berlijnsche Academie een groot aantal plaatsen openkwam, aan *George* een zetel heeft aangeboden. De dichter heeft beleefd bedankt. Dit neemt niet weg, dat in zijn verzen veel leeft van wat reeds in den oorlog en thans in den nationaal-socialistischen staat Duitsers heeft bezield" (314). After the omission the *Levensvormen* proceeds: "Inderdaad in zijn verzen leeft veel" (250–51). The American translation is clearly based on the abridged version of the *Levensvormen*: "The question has been asked whether George, whose last book of poetry was called *Das neue Reich*, is to be understood as having been the forerunner of the 'Third Reich.' Indeed his poetry contains much of what was the driving force behind the national-socialistic state" (23).

papers of Wach is not at all improbable. Wach and van der Leeuw knew each other and exchanged letters. I know of four letters Wach wrote to van der Leeuw in the years 1926, 1933, and 1935.[16]

## In Praise of Paganism

The author of the obituary deeply admires Stefan George (1868–1933) and praises him as poet, prophet, and legislator. Stefan George's "work and personality undoubtedly deserve the often misused epithet 'great.'" He compares George's words with the incantations of a magician—their themes, whether they derive from antiquity or from the Middle Ages, embody the soul of things. George's linguistic paintings reveal a human existence that is far removed from the rationality of modern culture: "He knew that the spirit is no spirit without the body." And the manifestation of the spirit is not restricted to the sound of words alone—the truth divine must turn into sensual reality. "As a pagan puritan he fights against abstractionism," the author notes. While the present age only knows idols in despair, he expected a new god to be born. He not only expected it, he found "the divine body, the incarnate god, in the shape of a beautiful youth from a suburb of Munich called Maximin." What had happened long ago in Christ happens again today. Like a pagan prophet, George turned the Christian notion of incarnation into a principle of a counterworld resisting modern natural sciences and their false consciousness: "This renewed consciousness of existence gives rise to a renewed culture: to liberate man from pure concrete fact, objectiveness." Here the author hits a crucial idea of George: though George adopted a Gnostic attitude toward the modern world and its self-understanding, he rejected the Docetism connected with its ancient forerunners.[17]

To illustrate George's critical attitude to modern culture, van der Leeuw transmits one anecdote about the tense relation between Stefan George and Max Weber; his source was Friedrich Wolters's George biography: "Max Weber once charged George with being unable to live without technology, without financial and economic institutions, i.e., without Silverberg & Cie. The poet replied that only he who carried a part of Silverberg & Cie. within himself could

16. I am grateful to Dr. Willem Hofstee, lecturer at the university of Leiden and author of *Goden en mensen: De godsdienstwetenschap van Gerardus van der Leeew, 1890–1950* (Kampen: Kok Agora 1997), for this information and copies of the letters.

17. For this analysis, see Stefan Breuer, "Zur Religion Stefan Georges," in *Stefan George: Werk und Wirkung seit dem "Siebten Ring,"* ed. by Wolfgang Braungart, Ute Oelmann, and Bernhard Böschenstein (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), 225–39.

not live without them: 'If telephones and railroads were to stop today, Mr. Silverberg and Cie could not longer exist—but I and my people would.'" The author agreed with the objection. "George is great in his struggle for a new culture from within."[18]

A delicate issue for the author of the Dutch obituary was the affinity of George's work with National Socialism as the omission of the reprint in 1948 reveals. Though van der Leeuw knew about it, he insisted that George's struggle was neither a military nor a political one. The Great War that killed his dearest pupils was not the real fight. His war poems, "which are the most beautiful ever written," envision a rebirth of his people. "The fight of the poet does not concern the breakdown of France, but the downfall of this rotting godless culture." At the conclusion, the author of the obituary makes the message of George without any reservation his own. George does not speak *about* the gods, he addresses them as incarnations in the midst of our life; a renewed consciousness of this kind liberates mankind from a wrong kind of objectiveness: "A powerful religious paganism is addressing us. Instead of a godless positivism or a godless mechanized culture, we are standing face to face with genuine non-Christian religiosity. We Christians are . . . waiting for that. . . . Negation is not an enemy with which Christianity can live and fight. Only demonic affirmation can bring the Church new struggle and new hope." J. Kitagawa apparently had difficulties with this praise of paganism but neutralized his worries: "Apparently Wach was enough a humanist to be fascinated by the aesthetic quality of Stefan George's poetry, even though Wach the Christian could not accept this form of modern paganism."[19]

Whatever Wach's views may have been, van der Leeuw shared George's appreciation of paganism. In an article published in the German periodical *Die Furche,* he praised a book of the German scholar Walter F. Otto. Otto declared the ancient god Dionysos as a power alive that still today reveals itself in epiphanies. Dionysos is not a past phenomenon: he is present in our own *kosmos*.[20] Also, according to van der Leeuw, paganism is not antiquated, but a reality of today.[21] His high esteem of George's poetry makes sense in the context of his adoption of the concept of *mentalité primitive*. In 1928 he introduced the concept of the French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) into the study of

18. Friedrich Wolters, *Stefan George und die Blätter für die Kunst: Deutsche Geistesgeschichte seit 1890* (Berlin: Bondi, 1930), 476.

19. Kitagawa, introduction, in *Understanding and Believing*, xv.

20. Walter F. Otto, *Dionysos: Mythos und Kult* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1933), 33. Cf. Hubert Cancik, "Dionysos 1933: W. F. Otto, ein Religionswissenschaftler und Theologe am Ende der Weimarer Republik," in *Die Restauration der Götter: Antike Religion und Neo-Paganismus*, ed. Richard Faber and Renate Schlesier (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1986), 105–23.

21. Gerardus van der Leeuw, "Die Wirklichkeit des Heidentums," *Die Furche* 21 (1935): 230.

religions.[22] According to Lévy-Bruhl, non-European peoples assume relations between things and persons that evade rational examination and contradict our logic. Lévy-Bruhl referred to these cases as a mystical form of thought. Van der Leeuw adopted that concept but in a rather fundamental point parted company with Lévy-Bruhl. Similar phenomena, he claimed, exist among civilized people: "What has been marginalized as 'primitive,' 'medieval,' 'scholastic' erupts again as a vital power."[23] Poetry is another case, since it too ignores distinctions between fact and meaning, reality and dream. The extensive German quotations of poems in George's obituary are based on the assumption that in modern rational culture, genuine religiosity is represented most adequately by poetry.

Let me draw a first conclusion. If the essay on George cannot be used to determine Wach's position in the field of religious studies, we should now consider the alternative proposal of Hans-Joachim Schoeps: that Wach was heavily influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber, as well as by Ernst Troeltsch, Georg Simmel, and Rudolf Otto.

## Wach's Revision of Max Weber's Systematics of Religion

Starting with his first publication, Joachim Wach continuously refers to Max Weber and his sociology of religion. It is not the Weber of *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, but the Weber of the religion section in *Economy and Society*. This is particularly conspicuous in Wach's Ph.D. thesis, *Der Erlösungsgedanke und seine Deutung* (1922).[24] The notion of salvation was at his time a crucial concept for establishing a particular class among historical religions. The first authority Wach cites in this regard is the philosopher Hermann Siebeck.[25] Siebeck in his *Lehrbuch der Religionsphilosophie* conceived of three classes of religions. The class of "natural religions" considers gods as saviors from external evil, while the category of "morality religions" considers them as guarantees of the existing social order; "salvation religions" focuses on the contradiction between the existence of God and the reality of a world devoid of meaning. In the latter class the notion of God can serve the denial of the world; accordingly, a believing subject is able to break with the world, both

22. Gerardus van der Leeuw, "La structure de la mentalité primitive," *Revue d'Historie et de Philosophie Religieuses* 8 (1928): 1–31.

23. Van der Leeuw, "Die Wirklichkeit des Heidentums," 230 (my translation).

24. Joachim Wach, *Der Erlösungsgedanke und seine Deutung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1922); in 1928 he wrote the historical and philosophical parts of the entry "Erlösung" (salvation) and the entry "Erlösungsreligionen" (religions of salvation) in the *RGG* $^2$ 1928, 266–69; 279–85; 285–86.

25. Wach, *Der Erlösungsgedanke*, 42.

theoretically and practically.[26] Fundamental to Siebeck's construction was a distinction between an *objective* and a *subjective* dimension of religions. The subjective dimension consists of religious thoughts, feelings, moods, and forebodings of both the individual and the community. The objective dimension consists of oral and written doctrines, commandments, prohibitions, promises, and actions, some symbolic and some directly graphic, which all serve to fill an individual and a community with the same spirit.[27] The two dimensions are dialectically related. There is no subjective religion that is not tied to objective forms, just as there are no transmitted forms that are not tied to the individual mind. For this mediated religion Siebeck used the term "religiosity."

Troeltsch and Weber appropriated the concept. Troeltsch emphasized that salvation religions alone can assure the subjectivity and personality of an individual; he assumed a general trend of the history of religion to "spiritualization, internalization, moralization, and individualization." In the entry "Salvation"[28] in the first edition of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Troeltsch introduced "salvation" as a bridge from the history of religions to the existential problematic of "meaning" and the other way around.[29] Max Weber likewise regarded the experience of a world contradicting all expectations of a meaningful life as the driving force of religious history: "This problem of the experience of the irrationality of the world was the driving force of all religious evolution. The Indian doctrine of Karma, Persian dualism, the doctrine of Original Sin, Predestination, and the Deus Absconditus all those have grown from this experience," he told his audience in a 1919 lecture, "Politics as a Vocation."[30]

When Wach in 1922 made the notion of "salvation" the subject of his Ph.D. thesis, he referred to Weber's chapter "Religious Communities" (respectively "Sociology of Religion") in *Economy and Society*. Max Weber had started his study of the ethics of the world religions in 1911 and engaged those religions that were based on congregations of laymen. Their social interests along with their religiosity established different practical attitudes to the world. The chapter on religion in *Economy and Society* was an outcome of this inquiry. When Weber finished it in 1913, he gave it the title "Religious Communities"; in 1921–22 it was published as "Sociology of Religion" as part of *Economy and Society*.[31] The thread

26. Hermann Siebeck, *Lehrbuch der Religionsphilosophie* (Freiburg/Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1893), 48–52.

27. Ibid., 264.

28. *RGG*, 1910, 481–88.

29. Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 120–24.

30. Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 123.

31. New edition: *Max Weber, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, *Religiöse Gemeinschaften*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg in cooperation with Petra Schilm and Jutta Niemeier (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

of his exposition was the changing means of redemption: the replacement of magic by sacrificial cult, cult by ethics, ethics of rule obedience by ethics of commitment. In this sequence it was the prophet and his charisma that launched a development that finally led to a disenchanted cosmos. Wach appreciated the distinctions Weber made in section 10 of that chapter between different practices to attain salvation.[32] But he refused to accept its premise. According to Weber, the desire for salvation has its root in the failure of the believer's claim that the course of the world may be meaningful; Wach gave it a positive foundation in the human soul.[33] Not a disenchantment of the world but an enchantment of the believer by religious associations directs the history of religions.

In 1927 Wach devoted an entire article to the theme "Max Weber als Religionssoziologe."[34] Before Weber there was no such thing as sociology of religion; Weber created it together with his friends Ernst Troeltsch and Werner Sombart, Wach noticed. But Wach added some criticism. Despite this achievement, his work remained widely ignored because Weber has "failed, better declined," to study religious data with respect to their inner side.[35] He considered Weber's focus on rationality as the content of religious acting one-sided, ignoring the much more crucial irrational phenomena in religious history.[36] The entire construction of a religious history fostering the disenchantment of the world remained alien to Wach; he regarded it is an exterior and inadequate criterion to understand religions.[37] Though Wach appreciated Weber's treatment of the means of salvation and summarized the chapter correctly, he saw his attempt to integrate religious history into the sociology of religion as a confusion of categories. According to Wach, the impact religions have on economy and society must remain part of religious studies. He applied this model in his last book, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, when he presented thinking, acting, and community formation as pure "expressions of religious experience," and not as a synthesis of religious symbolizations and mundane social interests, as Weber did. Weber had arranged diverse religious communities on the common thread of the issue of disenchantment; Wach removed that thread and replaced it with an irreducible solid religious experience that expresses itself in forms of doctrines, of actions, and of communities.

32. Wach, *Der Erlösungsgedanke*, 91n2.

33. Ibid., 42–43.

34. Joachim Wach, "Max Weber als Religionssoziologe," in *Kultur- und Universalgeschichte* (Leipzig: Festschrift Walter Goetz, 1927), reprinted with additions in Joachim Wach, *Einführung in die Religionssoziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1931), appendix 65–98. My remarks refer to this appendix.

35. Wach, "Max Weber als Religionssoziologe," 75.

36. Ibid., 81–82.

37. Ibid., 81n1.

## Religious Communities as a Major Issue

New kinds of social groups mushroomed in Germany in Weber's and Wach's time and stimulated attempts to conceive of the social form of religions.[38] Wach appreciated Weber's attempt to establish new categories.[39] Indeed, he noted that Max Weber was among the first to recognize the necessity of investigating them. In a talk during the first meeting of German social scientists in Frankfurt in 1910, Weber declared it a fundamental task of sociology to investigate the formations between the politically organized powers of state, municipality, and church on the one hand and the natural communities of the family on the other. It was in this intermediate field that the institutions of modern society were born.

A particular challenge to social scientists was the plurality of social forms representing Christianity. The urgency of this issue may be seen from the fact that the first meeting of German social scientists held in Frankfurt was dedicated to it. In a presentation that was followed by a lively debate, Ernst Troeltsch argued that Christianity had generated three equally entitled forms of religious communities: first, the church as an organization administering the sacramental means of salvation—for Troeltsch the most powerful and pervasive social form of Christianity; second, the voluntary sect as a community of the truly committed; third, mysticism as radical individualism.[40] With these three types of community Christianity had established different practical attitudes to the world. While Troeltsch sought the explanation for this diversity in the adoption of the Stoic concept of natural law by Christian theologians, his audience—among them Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel, Martin Buber, Max Weber, and others—introduced other points of view. Weber in his contribution agreed with Troeltsch's distinction but pointed out that in reality the three forms occur mostly mixed. In contrast to Troeltsch, he did not believe that the "church" developed more social power in spreading Christianity than "sects."[41] In the United States—in Weber's eyes the most religious country in terms of figures and commitment—Christianity had become so popular and effective because

38. Rainer Kolk, *Literarische Gruppenbildung am Beispiel des George-Kreises 1890–1945* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 107–50.

39. Joachim Wach, "Zur Methodologie der allgemeinen Religionswissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* 38 (1923): 41n23.

40. Ernst Troeltsch, "Das stoisch-christliche Naturrecht und das moderne profane Naturrecht," in *Verhandlungen der Deutschen Soziologentage*, I. Band. Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages vom 19–22 Oktober 1910 in Frankfurt a.M. Reden und Vorträge [ . . . ] und Debatten (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1911), 166–92; the minutes of the debate are on pp. 192–214.

41. Troeltsch, "Naturrecht," 175.

it was mostly organized as "sect" and not as "church."[42] When Georg Simmel joined the debate, he took issue with the idea that Christianity could assume an adequate social form. Due to its indifference toward mundane issues, its place is completely inside the intimate relation between the soul and God.[43] Martin Buber, too, rejected the idea that mysticism was a social category: for him, it is a purely psychological one.[44] Weber responded to both that a world-rejecting religiosity also deserves an observable life conduct that proves one's conviction; it generates a social reality of its own.

## The George Circle as a Challenge to Weber and Vice Versa

The circle around Stefan George was a challenge to Max Weber. It was through his own informal circle that he became acquainted with it. Max and Marianne had opened their home in Heidelberg on Sunday for friends, colleagues, intellectuals. Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch, who later became prominent in the Communist movement, were among the participants.[45] Those who attended shared a critical view on a type of sociology that conceived of social history in terms of a quasi-natural development. Instead, they regarded the rise of modern bureaucracy as a threat to human culture and spontaneity. Their debates revolved around the Russian writers Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky; they were nearly personally present in the Ziegelhäuser Landstrasse, one of the visitors remembered.[46] Leo Tolstoy in particular was an authority. When Max Weber in his speech about the meaning of science ("Science as Vocation") reminded his audience of Nietzsche's devastating criticism of the "last men" who believed to have invented happiness, he referred his audience to Tolstoy. "He has given the simplest answer, with the words: 'Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for

42. Troeltsch, *Verhandlungen*, 1910, 201–2.

43. Ibid., 205. Volkhard Krech refers to the impact vitalism had on Simmel at that time in *Georg Simmels Religionstheorie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 210.

44. Troeltsch, *Verhandlungen*, 1910, 206–7.

45. Éva Karádi, "Ernst Bloch und Georg Lukács im Max Weber-Kreis," in *Max Weber und seine Zeitgenossen*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Wolfgang Schwentker (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 682–702.

46. Paul Honigsheim, "Erinnerungen an Max Weber," in *Max Weber zum Gedächtnis. Materialien und Dokumente zur Bewertung von Werk und Persönlichkeit: Teil II. Max Weber in Heidelberg*, 2nd ed., ed. René König and Johannes Winckelmann (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1985), 240; Edith Hanke, *Prophet des Unmodernen: Leo N. Tolstoi als Kulturkritiker in der deutschen Diskussion der Jahrhundertwende* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993); Hanke, "Das spezifisch intellektualistische Erlösungsbedürfnis. Oder: Warum Intellektuelle Tolstoi lasen," in *Intellektuelle im deutschen Kaiserreich*, ed. Gangolf Hübinger and Wolfgang J. Mommsen (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1993), 158–71; Hanke, "Erlösungsreligionen," in *Max Webers "Religionssystematik,"* ed. Hans Gerhard Kippenberg and Martin Riesebrodt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 209–36.

us: "What shall we do, how shall we live?"' Science is unable to solve any of the fundamental questions of our life or to provide meaning regarding our conduct of life."[47] In these debates the quest for a meaningful life, the failure of that expectation, and the concept of theodicy were linked to each other—a link fundamental to Weber's construction of the history of religions.[48]

Among the participants were disciples of George.[49] At the instigation of one of them, Friedrich Gundolf, Max Weber and Stefan George met in person in 1910. We have two versions of their encounter, one in the biography of Marianne Weber, the other in Friedrich Wolters's biography of George, mentioned earlier. Marianne tells that she and Max were moved by the claim of George to be a poet and a prophet. The two hours they talked together left a deep impression upon them and created some greater closeness than ever before. But the foundation of George's doctrine—the deification of human beings and the establishment of a George cult—they rejected as self-deception. Marianne narrates that George had fallen in love with a young man called Maximilian Kronberger; he became fascinated by Maximin and venerated him as an incarnation of the divine—an absurd cult in the eyes of Max and Marianne Weber. Marianne also mentions antagonistic views about the war. While Weber later in World War I appreciated the readiness of the common German to sacrifice his life for the sake of his county, George could only perceive a tragedy, a punishment for renouncing genuine culture. But their verdict did not extend to George's disciples. Marianne and Max felt great sympathy with them: their longing to become part of a greater entirety, to be redeemed from the cult of the ego, to conduct a life according to a new "law."[50]

This narration can be substantiated by occasional remarks in Max Weber's letters and publications. In a letter to Dora Jellinek, Weber acknowledged George as a poet who makes accessible unknown areas of the soul, but Weber uttered reservations about the mission George and the circle attributed to art. Weber regarded them as a sect—even an absurd one—due to the cult of Maximin.

47. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), ("Science as vocation"), 143.

48. Hartmann Tyrell, "Intellektuellenreligiosität, 'Sinn'-Semantik, Brüderlichkeitsethik—Max Weber im Verhältnis zu Tolstoi und Dostojewski," in *Max Weber und Osteuropa*, ed. Anton Sterbling and Heinz Zipprian (Hamburg: Kramer, 1997), 25–58; Kippenberg and Riesebrodt, *Max Webers "Religionssystematik."*

49. Rainer Kolk, "Das schöne Leben: Stefan George und sein Kreis in Heidelberg," in *Heidelberg im Schnittpunkt intellektueller Kreise. Zur Topographie der "geistigen Geselligkeit" eines "Weltdorfes:" 1850–1950*, ed. Hubert Treiber and Karol Sauerland (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995), 310–27; Volker Kruse, "Die Heidelberger Soziologie und der Stefan George-Kreis," in *Wissenschaftler im George-Kreis: Die Welt des Dichters und der Beruf der Wissenschaft*, ed. Bernhard Böschenstein *et al.* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 259–76.

50. Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography* (1926), trans. Harry Zohn (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1998), 457–64; Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber: Die Leidenschaft des Denkens* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 468–71.

George's recent literary products claiming the promise of salvation he declared incomprehensible ecstatic roaring.[51] The religious notions he applies derive from his assumption, that the primordial type for the associations between state and family is the sect; the circle of George according to Weber was an artistic sect (*künstlerische Sekte*). On the occasion of the meeting in Frankfurt in 1910, he specified George's poetry as a stronghold uncapturable by the modern powers.[52]

Friedrich Wolters's narration of the same meeting, referred to previously, is as revealing of the George Circle as Marianne's of the Weber Circle.[53] George saw Weber as an embodiment of the powers of the age: a man affirming these powers, though admitting the damage they inflict. Weber, a Protestant, feared nothing more than to fall victim to an unreasonable spell. Therefore, he fought for disenchantment also in his academic work by critically dismantling all inherent metaphysical claims of state, church, economy, race, in short of every transindividual institution. Weber saw human history as a struggle between magic and enchantment, on the one hand, and science and cognition, on the other. As a person, Weber always defended the opposite of what was in agreement with his own inclinations; he conveyed a sense of unhappiness; his work was unable to dissolve the tensions of the age, while the poet had found a way. Worse: Weber was unable to recognize the charisma of George; he was unable to imagine a pagan solution to the ills of the modern world. His attempt to interpret George in terms of religions of redemption was a complete failure. While Weber believed in the immutable circumstances of the actual conditions, George did not. Wolters's anecdote about the alleged dependence of George on these powers and George's response perfectly illustrates that point.

## The George Circle as Model for the Relationship between Master and Disciple

The antagonistic relations between both men and circles and their diagnosis of their age and culture did not prevent Wach from an attempt to revise Weber's sociology of religion by applying it to the George circle and by conceiving of the

51. Max Weber, *Briefe: 1909–1910*, edited by M. Rainer Lepsius and Wolfgang J. Mommsen in cooperation with Birgit Rudhard and Manfred Schön (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 559–63.

52. Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1924), 441–46; 453; Arvid Brodersen, "Stefan George und sein Kreis: Eine Deutung aus der Sicht Max Webers," *Castrum Peregrini* 91 (1970): 5–24.

53. Wolters, *Stefan George*, 470–78.

circle in terms of Weber's concepts. This happened in the speech Wach delivered as part of his graduation for lecturer (*Habilitation*): *Meister und Jünger: Zwei religionssoziologische Betrachtungen*.[54] The essay consists of two parts originally composed for different audiences.[55] The book is framed by references to Stefan George and his circle. It opens with the "motto" from "Der Stern des Bundes": "Only there man's nature is sustained where the darksome offer is retained."[56] At the end, a penultimate footnote praises the circle around Stefan George. Their members have taught us how to look at the history of images of great human beings and their work. The manner in which they studied literature, art, and political history has proved highly fecund for other disciplines; for the history of religions it should become of highest importance too. Here, Wach also mentions his own attempt in chapter 4 of his *Religionswissenschaft*.[57] Finally, the last footnote introduces the notion of the covenant; it refers to an essay of Hermann Schmalenbach, who took from George the notion of the covenant (*Bund*), a new kind of social bond different from natural community, on the one hand, and society, on the other.[58] After the essay *Meister und Jünger* had appeared, Wach inquired with Gundolf in a letter in May 1925: Do you think I can dare to send a copy of it to the man whose figure was in my mind when writing it and whose works are subject of my love and admiration?"[59]

The first part deals with master and disciple by comparing them with teacher and student and by outlining a typology: here the teacher, who transmits knowledge to his students and disappears behind this task; there the master, who entertains a personal relation with his disciples; a teacher gives without receiving, while in contrast the master depends on his disciples; the teacher survives in his work, the master in those who bear witness to him. "The master becomes a master only in relationship to a disciple." "It is the disciple who ordains his master to mastership." It is this specific kind of mutuality that makes the difference between both: while a student becomes (like the) teacher himself, the master is destined to depart from the world and to persist only in the imagination of his disciples. His image is shaped by the subjective experiences of the disciples. "As he has seen the master, so he paints his picture that

54. Joachim Wach, *Meister und Jünger: Zwei religionssoziologische Betrachtungen* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1925); English translation: "Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies," in Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory Alles (New York: Macmillan 1988), 1–32.

55. Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs*, 41–42.

56. Wach, *Meister und Jünger*, 1.

57. Ibid., 74n52.

58. Hermann Schmalenbach, "Die soziologische Kategorie des Bundes," *Die Dioskuren* 1 (1922): 35–105.

59. Lothar Helbing and Claus Victor Bock, eds., *Stefan George: Dokumente seiner Wirkung: Aus dem Friedrich Gundolf Archiv der Universität London* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini, 1974), 273–74.

it might be imprinted on the memory."[60] The image of the master is shaped by the subjective experiences and aspirations of the disciples. Those who were left behind are held together through their image of the master and form an association.

The second part of the essay "The Meaning of the Master's Life" depicts the specifics of that image. The cases selected are Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus, and Empedokles. Wach sketches the rise of the image of these masters according to the historical traditions, but integrates the details into a kind of typical plot: the calling of the redeemer; his temptation to keep his knowledge for himself and to get salvation without the hardship of the mission; his readiness to sacrifice himself; his departure from the world. Here, a master like Buddha has a different fate than a prophet like Muhammad or Jesus: "While the person of the prophet in itself is not of decisive significance for the proposed mission, the master is the carrier of a metaphysical meaning."[61] This meaning has its roots in his consciousness: "The consideration of the particular kind of *charisma*—upon which Max Weber has placed special emphasis in his religious-sociological treatise—is not decisive for us. We proceed from the experience of the respective personality; we will not only analyze it psychologically but understand it in its full intention by showing its meaning for the master's whole existence and the consequences of the master's life."[62]

The issue of the relationship of the disciples to their master opens a gaze into the genesis and structure of religious associations. With the vanishing of the master his image lives in the hearts of his disciples and starts changing along with the disciples. When this process meets resistance by enemies, the image is on the way to become a myth. Here follows the footnote referring to scholars in the George circle and their reconstructions of the history of the images of great human beings. The line of the exposition shows that the George circle was not Wach's "religious" frame of reference or even the root of his religious identity, as Flasche argued, but rather a subject of interest that he wanted to comprehend adequately. To do so, he formulated the requirements for a new kind of hermeneutics. It is not personal experience that enables understanding religion or art.

> Under no circumstances is understanding what it is often said to be: sympathy (imitative feeling, *Nachfühlen*) or imitative experience (*Nacherleben*). It is an entirely spontaneous, productive act. . . . If I want to understand the meaning of a religion or a work of art, I

60. Wach, *Meister und Jünger*, 11; Wach, "Master and Disciple,"5.
61. Wach, *Meister und Jünger*, 21; Wach, "Master and Disciple" 11–12.
62. Wach, *Meister und Jünger*, 22–23; Wach, "Master and Disciple," 13.

> certainly do not need to fall back upon the psychological condition of the person with whom it originated. Dilthey and his followers have taught us that.[63]

Understanding either religion or art is not achieved by empathy for a person or object; it is achieved by establishing a relationship that transforms the object as well as the subject. The issue of hermeneutics became of paramount importance to Wach. This was the reason that he called in his *Religionswissenschaft* for a division of religious studies into a systematic part and a historical part.[64] But he rejected the idea that one must connect the systematic part with theology; rather, philosophy is the natural mother discipline. And he meant it. Wach in the years to come scrutinized the entire history of the philosophical hermeneutical tradition. The three volumes by Joachim Wach published in 1926, 1929, and 1933 were written to replace empathy by a method that allows recognizing the contingent interfaces between subjective religiosity and objectified religion or art.

## Salvation by Means of Art and the Issue of Religious Associations

Wach saw understanding as an act that transforms the subject of that action. A similar appreciation of art was current at that time. Here Georg Simmel enters the scene. No other form of art is more suitable to reveal the power of the soul than poetry, Simmel was convinced. According to him, the poems by Stefan George elicited in the reader a response that derives from the artistic product but is experienced as his or her own. The aesthetic quality of a work rests in its "mental acoustics." George's poems transcend the naturalism of modern culture and reestablish a connection with a soul deeply buried under the new cultural powers of the modern age. Like other artistic products, they are mighty enough to liberate the subject from the hegemony of a mechanized worldview.[65] Max Weber likewise cited art as means of salvation but saw it as dangerous and detrimental to rational modern culture. He recognized that religions and art have become rivals in liberating mankind from the iron cage of rationality, but

63. Joachim Wach, *Religionswissenschaft: Prolegomena zu ihrer wissenschaftstheoretischen Grundlegung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1924); English translation: Joachim Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory Alles (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 111.

64. Jörg Rüpke critically addresses Wach's distinction between systematics and history in his *Historische Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2007), 17–27.

65. Georg Simmel, "Stefan George—Eine kunstphilosophische Studie," *eue Deutsche Rundschau* 13 (1901): S. 207–15; reprinted again in Georg Simmel, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 189–1900*, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and David Frisby (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 287–300.

he strictly rejected any appreciation like that of Simmel.[66] That art has become a sphere of its own like science or economy and that its autarky contributed to a mental counterworld and enabled salvation from the pressure of rationalism indicated only a regrettable reenchantment of the world.[67]

Wach conveyed a similar idea on art in the entry "Salvation" in the second edition of the *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* and in contrast to Weber welcomed it:

> The experience of being uplifted and the internal peace brought about by art is also frequently described as "salvation." Even in antiquity this was so (Plato and Plotinus), and more recent aestheticians, especially the Romantics, have developed similar theories. In Schopenhauer's view, art provides us with a way of becoming free from "will" through the contemplation of ideas. It provides human beings with occasional flights from the world of appearances and its pressures—hence, a transitory salvation.

"The 'salvic' effects of music have also been praised," Wach, descendant of Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, added.[68]

In his *Master and Disciple*, Wach wants to prove that religious studies have a higher competence to study religion as a social phenomenon than social scientists. A study of religious associations as part of religious history is preferable to their study in the context of sociology. At the end of the essay on *Meister und Jünger*, Wach proposed a new concept for their relationship: "The disciple's experience of the master is a social one; . . . it is a form of social experience. It exhibits the laws of communities as such. The corresponding sociological category is the 'Bund' ('covenant'), as we lately have been so beautifully shown."[69] Wach here refers to a study by Hermann Schmalenbach, published in 1922. Schmalenbach introduced alongside the established social categories of "community" as a natural entity (Gemeinschaft) and "society" at large a third category: the covenant (*Bund*). As Schmalenbach wrote, he adopted the category from Stefan George's *Stern des Bundes*.[70] The "Bund," as Ulrike Brunotte has shown, represented and expressed the common experiences and expectations

66. Klaus Lichtblau, "'Innerweltliche Erlösung vom Rationalen' oder 'Reich diabolischer Herrlichkeit'?" Kunst und Religion bei Georg Simmel und Max Weber, in *Kunst und Religion: Studien zur Kultursoziologie und Kulturgeschichte*, ed. Richard Faber and Volkhard Kech (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), 51–78; Wolf Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen: Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft* (Munich: Hanser, 1985), 335–55.

67. Max Weber, "Science as Vocation" in Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, 340–43.

68. Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, 193.

69. Wach, "Master and Disciple," 20 (translation slightly emended by author).

70. Herman Schmalenbach, "Die soziologische Kategorie des Bundes," *Die Dioskuren: Jahrbuch für Geisteswissenschaften* 1 (1922): S. 35–105 on 42–43.

of a younger German generation that rebelled against the norms of the dominant rational culture and fled the urban culture.[71] Wach attempted to conceive systematically of that new kind of modern religious association that had broken with natural as well as social constraints. In his entry "Sociology of Religion" in the *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie*[72] and in his later book *Sociology of Religion*,[73] Wach studied religious associations as an embodiment of the interplay between subjective experiences and such external forms as literature, doctrine, myths. and so on. We still sense some impact of Max Weber, but more as contrast than as continuity. Whereas Weber defined types of religious communities in terms of practical attitudes toward the world and traced them to the different paths of salvation that the religious specialists propagated and represented, Wach defined them in terms of the internal experiences. Ethics are replaced by aesthetics.[74] In his *Sociology of Religion*, Wach introduced a reflection on the history of the relation between religion and art. In the Western world, art had been emancipated from religion since the Renaissance; and, he added, "so long as artistic creativity served its original purpose, its integrating influence on religious groups was immeasurable."[75]

In the foregoing, I have presented Wach in a way that differs from what Americans generally know of him. I have treated him as the representative of an intellectual milieu that was destroyed in the 1930s. I do not need to explain that his work got a new direction during his sojourn at Brown and Chicago. Though this direction contributed to the rise of the academic study of religion in the United States, the profile of his work can fully be assessed only when we look at his time in Germany. In recent years the works of many contemporary scholars of Wach have received new attention: their writings reprinted in annotated editions, their ideas debated in various circles and manners. Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Georg Simmel are quoted, debated, contested, and praised. It is certainly worthwhile to start a debate about Joachim Wach's attempt to introduce art into the issue of religious communities.

71. Ulrike Brunotte, *Zwischen Eros und Krieg: Männerbund in der Moderne* (Berlin: Wagenbach 2004), 89–117.

72. Joachim Wach, "Religionssoziologie," in *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie*, ed. Alfred Vierkandt (Stuttgart: Enke, 1931), 479–94.

73. Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

74. Eric J. Ziolkowski, "Wach, Religion, and 'The Emancipation of Art,'" *Numen* 46 (1999): 345–69.

75. Wach, Sociology of Religion, 44.

# 2

# The Master-Interpreter: Notes on the German Career of Joachim Wach (1922–1935)

*Steven M. Wasserstrom*

> Scholars ought to be interpreters. That is their *raison d'être*. And their interpretation should concern matters of existential significance. That is their *raison d'être* today [1951].
>
> —J. Wach, *Types of Religious Experience*, xiii

## Introduction: The Task of the Interpreter

Joachim Wach's posthumous book *The Comparative Study of Religions* was originally delivered as the Barrows Lectures in India, under the title *A New Era in the Comparative Study of Religions*.[1] Shortly after he completed its manuscript and then unexpectedly died, his invitee, Mircea Eliade, delivered the Haskell Lectures in Chicago. A generation later, in 1984, Kurt Rudolph delivered the same Haskell Lectures. Rudolph, a leading expert on Wach and the Leipzig school, argued in one lecture that Wach "abandoned his original aim of developing a history of religions independent of

I thank Peter Steinberger, the Dean of Reed College, for multiple acts of support in the preparation of this research. I also thank Zoe Calman, Michael Salk, and James Meador for much needed help. The staff of the Regenstein Library Archives has been very accommodating. I also thank Wendy Doniger and Christian Wedemeyer for the invitation. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Charles Adams, Joachim Wach's student, who guided me to study Islam and the history of religions.

1. Joachim Wach, *Understanding and Believing* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975 [1968]), 145.

theology and the philosophy of religion and allowed a place to questions that are obviously theological."[2] Less than two years later, Eliade passed away. New eras were in the air again.

I begin with the presently scant reception of the new "history of religions" as Wach conceived it. As every encyclopedia entry tells us, Wach founded this new school of religious studies at Chicago. His work itself, however, is not much more than a historical curiosity to many in the field, who today can tell you only that he was responsible for importing *Verstehen* as a professional ideal.[3] What Rudolph called "abandoning his original aim" needs, then, doubly to be explained. First, we need to understand that original aim in its original terms, to understand what went wrong before his arrival in Hyde Park. That task constitutes the bulk of my analysis here. I would like, however, also to account for that "abandoning." A fresh reading of Wach's preemigration biography speaks to the aim and its abandonment, as one tentative avenue for explaining the ultimate failure of his larger project.[4]

Descended on both sides of his family from the noble Mendelssohns—who had for four generations produced philosophers, composers, bankers, men of industry, and scholars—Joachim Wach in 1935 abruptly found himself a deposed king of *Kultur*. As a veteran of the Great War, he was strongly marked by the perceived civilizational *Krisis*, a perception understandably common in the so-called Generation of 1914. From the time of his demobilization until the

2. Kurt Rudolph, *Historical Fundamentals on the Study of Religions: Haskell Lectures Delivered at the University of Chicago* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 37. Rudolph provided the most informed historical overview of Wach in his German context in Kurt Rudolph, *Die Religionsgeschichte an der Leipziger Universität und die Entwicklung der Religionswissenschaft: Ein Beitrag zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte und zum Problem der Religionswissenschaft* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), 137–49. Rudolph notes Wach's response to the Third Reich: "In seiner ihm abverlangten wissenschaftlichen Selbstdarstellung legte er seine Auffassung vom erzierherischen Sinn des Professorenberufes dar, ohne irgendwelche Kompromisse mit der neuen 'Weltanschauung,' die inzwischen zur Herrschaft gelangt war, zu schließen" (140). On what Rudolph himself took from Wach, see Gregory D. Alles, "Review of Kurt Rudolph's *Geschichte und Probleme der Religionswissenschaft*," *Journal of Religion* 75, 1 (January, 1995): 156–57.

3. The only full-scale study of sustained value is that of Rainer Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978). Wolf-Friedrich Schäufele authored a fairly complete (and also usefully digitalized version) for the Bautz Verlag, Band XVI (1999) Spalten 1507–12. A reasonable discussion of Wach's foundational *Religionswissenschaft* monograph of 1924 can be found in Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *The Study of Religion in a New Key: Theoretical and Philosophical Soundings in the Comparative and General Study of Religion* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2003), 162–65. Jensen believes that this monograph "was the first book-length presentation of methodological and theoretical issues from the study of religion related, in a systematic manner, to questions from the philosophy of science" (162n2).

4. "Eliade" gets more than 1 million hits on Google, "Joachim Wach" only about 300,000 (and many are not our man). Wach does not appear in the *Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (2006) or in Carl Olson's textbook *Theory and Method* (2003). Nor did he have an impact in *Verstehen* studies: the Anthony O'Hear collection Verstehen *and Human Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), has nothing of Wach in it, even in David Cooper's "*Verstehen*, Holism and Fascism," which deals with Wach's social milieu. Indicators consistently show little remaining impact. In Franz Pöchhacker, *Introducing Interpreting Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), again, there is no Wach.

time of his exile, the young professor looked to become a leading generational avatar of the German *Kultur* epitomized by his own family. However, on April 29, 1935, Wach became the first and only sitting professor of *Religionswissenschaft* forced from his post on the basis of the April 7, 1933, laws against teachers of Jewish descent.[5] In the same month, April 1935, his beloved teacher Friedrich Heiler swore allegiance to Adolf Hitler, under whose Reich his career continued to thrive.

In his review of Rainer Flasche's monograph on Wach, Theodore Ludwig agreed with Flasche on a fundamental point of analysis: "Wach shaped his own idea of religious experience [in the Stefan George *Kreis*] which he later elevated as both the basic method and the norm of religious understanding. Flasche has here made an important suggestion regarding Wach's spiritual development [which he uses] as one of his central keys in understanding not only Wach's own religiosity but the development of his scholarship." Ludwig worried, however, that Flasche "presented no other evidence for it."[6] In the following I will provide this missing evidence, which amply speaks to the structure, function, and history of his German career. The questions I bring to this material emerge from an intersection of intellectual history and disciplinary history.[7]

## Youth Movements

The newly demobilized Wach became an active member of what eventually became several ultranationalist youth movement circles. As far as I have been able to ascertain, he first belonged to the Freideutsche Jugend, then, under the sway of George, the Freischar.[8] He was also an invited guest (*befreundete Gast des Kreises*) at the Leuchtenburgkreis.[9] His association with this latter circle apparently derived from its proximity to Leipzig.[10]

5. For the sources, see Fritz Heinrich, *Die deutsche Religionswissenschaft und der Nationalsozialismus: Eine ideologiekritische und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Petersberg: M. Imhof Verlag), 493n1593.

6. Theodore M. Ludwig, "Walking Part of the Way with Wach," *History of Religions* 22, no. 3 (1983): 287.

7. See, for example, Loren Graham, Wolf Lepenies, and Peter Weingart, eds., *Functions and Uses of Disciplinary Histories* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel; Hingham, Mass.: Kluwer, 1983).

8. According to Jerry Z. Muller, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 282, Wach was "senior mentor to the Deutsche Freischar of the youth movement." And see chapter 15 of Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 144–54, titled "Ernst Buske and the Freischar"; see p. 148 on Freyer's influence on the Freischar.

9. See Fritz Borinski et al., eds., *Jugend im politischen Protest. Der Leuchtenburgkreis 1923–1933–1977*, in *Quellen und Beiträge zur Geschichte der Jugendbewegung*, vol. 19 (Frankfurt am Main, dipa-Verlag, 1977). In fall 1926, Wach was an invited guest, lecturing on work of the Prussian minister of culture, C. H. Becker, "Die Pädagogische Akademie im Aufbau eines nationalen Bildungswesens"; see p. 30. See more generally Fritz Borinski and Werner Milch, *Jugendbewegung: Die Geschichte der deutschen Jugendbewegung 1896–1933* (Frankfurt am Main: dipa-Verlag, 1982), and see more specifically http://www.museum-leuchtenburg.de/html/ausflug/ausflug.htm.

10. Cited at http://www.museum-leuchtenburg.de/html/ausflug/ausflug.htm.

His allegiances were made plain, at least to the trained eye, throughout his work from this period, but nowhere more so than in his *Meister und Jünger. Zwei rel.soziologische Betrachtungen* (1925). The first of its two studies appeared in 1922, in the first of the new series of *Freideutsche Jugend*.[11] His pattern of citations cued an informed reader into its *Sitz im Leben*. For example, his citation of Hans Blüher, a leading ideologue of the *Jugendbewegung*, is especially noteworthy. Mohler's standard work on the Conservative Revolution cites Blüher as a leading Völkisch thinker.[12] Blüher was a Prussian monarchist, noted for his sexological theories, and a prime mover in the youth movements in particular. He was also anti-Semitic, and amply so, including even the very work that Wach prominently cited.[13] In that endnote to *Meister und Jünger*, Wach rhapsodized about master-disciple circles in which a "*fellowship of destiny* predominated. [The Master] did not choose the most distinguished, the best, the most able; he chose those to whom his heart turned out of a *deep sense of inner affinity*" (emphasis added). Wach's bibliographical citation for this passage reads, simply, "Hans Blueher, *Die Aristie des Jesus von Nazareth* (1921); see especially chap. xi." In his excursus on Blüher, along with several others, Wach revealed himself to be engagé, and not impartially value neutral.[14]

Wach was to continue his association with the *Jugendbewegung*, publishing, for example, in the *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugenbildung* in 1930.[15] As late as 1934, when he was thirty-six years old, he was apparently emotionally attached in certain key respects to his youth experience. Ominously, however, it was now outmoded and replaced by a new language, the language of *Kampf* and *Entscheidung*.[16] Some years after the heyday of the youth movements, in his

11. "Meister und Jünger/Lehrer und Schüler," *Freideutsche Jugend: Eine Monatsschrift aus dem Geiste der Jugend* 8, no. 9 (1922): 233–39.

12. Armin Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932: Ein Handbuch*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Stocker-Verlag, 1999).

13. Hans Blüher, *Secessio Judaica: Philosophische Grundlegung der historischen Situation des Judentums und der antisemitischen Bewegung* (Berlin: W. Ritter, 1922). Hans Blüher conducted an Auseinandersetzung with Wach's student H. J. Schoeps, *Streit um Israel: Ein jüdisch-christliches Gespräch* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1933).

14. For a contemporary reaction, see http://www.schuledesrades.org/palme/schule/erbe/?Q=4/7/38/0/0/1/39. Wach also cites Ernst Bertram's *Nietzsche*, which enjoyed a considerable vogue in that day. On his best-seller status, see Robert Edward Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 587; on Bertram's resonant Nazi speech of May 3, 1933, see Norton, *Secret Germany*, 730. The English version of "Master and Disciple," copied then by Kitagawa into *Essays in the History of Religions*, gives this translation: "Bertram, in the chapter significantly called 'Socrates' of his beautiful book on Nietzsche, also explores this problem with reference to his hero; he discusses the final silence which is laid upon the existence of the master; indeed he goes further and speaks of the deception involved," 27.

15. "Philosophische Strömungen der Gegenwart in Frankreich," *Neue Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Jugenbildung* 6 (1930): 282–85.

16. Joachim Wach, "Religiöse Existenz: Zu dem Dostojewskij-Buch Romano Guardinis," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 49 (1934): 194.

final address of 1935. Van der Leeuw extolled such decisive engagement: "I am reminded of our youth associations and their experience, their symbolism and their customs; in them the world of primitive man [*Naturmensch*] is not only imitated externally but actually felt in participation, and it becomes clear that their experience of it is not a purely intellectual affair."[17]

## *"Herr der Wende"*

The "fellowship of destiny" that Wach found in the youth movements was most strongly exemplified in the circle of Stefan George.[18] Wach had first affiliated with youth groups for whom Blüher and George loomed especially large. "But the next step would be for the order of the elect to constitute itself through recognizing the prophet. . . . this detail was added by Stefan George, and Hans Blüher of the youth movement was right when he spoke of the 'self-selection' of those who would later recognize the Führer."[19] This fact has been neglected in scholarship on Wach in part because his sister, Susi Heigl-Wach, and Joseph Kitagawa neither included the substantial and telling endnotes to *Meister und Jünger* in the English edition nor even alerted readers to their existence, thus leaving the impression that Wach gave the monograph six notes, when in fact he wrote fifty-three of them. "*Meister und Jünger*," as Flasche put it, "is more a hymn to the George circle than it is a socio-religious study." Wach sang such a hymn, moreover, with an apocalyptic ardor common in his cohort: "We live at a turning point in time and the 'Lord of Turning' [*Herr der Wende*] must rule our life."[20]

Wach's allegiance to the George *Kreis* was epitomized in van der Leeuw's essay devoted to George, unpublished in their lifetime, but which may have been written between 1934 and 1936.[21] Flasche believes that this essay, along

17. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 135. Thomas Mann speaks of "the anti-intellectual movement represented in Germany especially by Klages." See Raymond Furness, *Zarathustra's Children: A Study of a Lost Generation of German Writers* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2000), 118, citing Kerényi letter of February 20, 1934.

18. George was a major feature of the youth movement culture sphere, as one influential source declares succinctly. "Nietzsche, Lagarde, Stefan George became its heroes and were read, quoted, imitated and freely plagiarized." Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 44.

19. Henry Maximilian Pachter, *Weimar Etudes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 19.

20. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 23.

21. "Stefan George (1868–1933): Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism," in *Understanding and Believing*, 11–30. At the conference in which the present essay was presented, Hans J. Kippenberg revealed his significant discovery that, while Kitagawa published this text as a work by Wach, in fact it was composed by Gerardus van der

with *Meister und Jünger*, provides the key to his German career.[22] Van der Leeuw recollected, "[I] very vividly remember how, when I was attending the Gymnasium, a book from George fell into my hands for the first time." Stefan George, he said, "strangely captivated me."[23] As I hope to show, Wach neither repudiated nor disassociated himself from the spiritual world of George so romanticized by van der Leeuw. Paul Monod recently and pithily characterized the George allure:

> From the first, the tone of the Circle was homoerotic and misogynist, although the "master's" own homosexuality was a taboo subject. His followers tended to be privileged, well-educated young men, often from Jewish families. Firmly elitist and ardently patriotic in their attitudes, they addressed George as their leader or *Führer*, and shared his deep suspicion of democratic politics, as well as his hope to recover the German spirit by stirring up memories of past greatness under charismatic leaders.[24]

Van der Leeuw, in the essay on George attributed to Wach, cast the disciple's relation to the master in religious terms. "The fight of the poet [concerns] the downfall of this rotting, godless culture."[25] "Yet, George gives us three things, which we as Christians need to be concerned with: (1) the realization of existence, (2) the attempt to renew culture and (3) the victory over an areligious positivism by a stark, deep religious paganism."[26] Their answer to the perceived crisis of the modern world was aesthetic and affective: it was the poetry of love. And strange as it seems, George's "incarnate god," Maximin, was a *suburban Jewish teenager*.[27]

George's disciples never forgot his Master's advent as a new Lord, their "Herr der Wende."[28] Close associates of the *Kreis* tended to remain loyal long after the death of the Master.[29] Indeed, Wach, like George himself, died in

Leeuw. I have left this section of my lecture more or less in the form in which it was originally presented at the conference, since this corrected authorship does not otherwise alter the substance of my argument.

22. Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs*.

23. Van der Leeuw, "Stefan George (1868–1933): Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism," 11.

24. Paul Monod, "Reading the Two Bodies of Ernst Kantorowicz," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 50 (2005): 109.

25. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 25.

26. Ibid., 26.

27. Ibid., 20.

28. In "Stefan George (1868–1933) Poet and Priest of Modern Paganism," van der Leeuw acknowledges that "[George's] poetry contains much of what was the driving force behind the national socialistic state." In *Understanding and Believing*, 23.

29. Consider the example of another Prussian World War I veteran who committed to the George Circle and had a youthful German academic success while under its spell and who then fled to the United States to become a famous professor at a major university: Ernst Kantorowicz (1895–1963). Karl Löwith visited him in

Locarno, Italy, a vicinity housing a small George colony, a short drive from neighboring Ascona.[30] In his archive at Regenstein Library, there are seven preciously preserved English translations of George poems. Single-sided, typed, centered, and folded along the same four horizontal creases, they appear to be have been sent or received as letters sometime during his American career.[31]

## The Meaning and Existence of the Master

Wach's German career was steeped in a culture of mastery. Like his friend Hans Heinrich Schaeder, he enjoyed a "passion for scientific masterpieces" (*Enthusiasmus für wissenschaftliche Meisterwerke*),[32] and like senior George disciple Friedrich Gundolf, he looked to build a "total man" (*Gesamtmensch*).[33] His exact contemporary, the budding Islamicist S. D. Goitein, in his 1923 *Nachrufe* for the late Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel, who like George had accrued a *Kreis*, identified the rabbi as "Meister."[34] Wach himself writes a "Meisterstück" on Otto in 1931, followed by a fuller tribute in 1947.

> An air of mystery surrounded Otto. . . . The students who followed his lectures tensely and with awe called him the Saint ("*der Heilige* . . .") . . . this designation was singularly appropriate. Neither before nor since my meeting Otto have I known a person who impressed one more genuinely as a true mystic. There was something in him of the solitude into which an intimate communion with the Divine has frequently led those who were favoured in this way.[35]

Wach went even further, citing someone (not insignificantly, unnamed) who called Otto a king (*ein Herrscher*), and another who said he was "prophet of an

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California: "I go to Ernst Kantorowicz, who has in the meantime secularized his George Reich, and who now says 'somehow.' A vast array of liquor in a grotesque movie diva apartment." Cited in Ernst Osterkamp, "The Legacy of the George Circle," in *Exile, Science and Bildung: The Contested Legacies of German Intellectual Figures*, ed. David Kettler and Gerhard Lauer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 23.

30. Also near the home of Ludwig Klages.

31. I am especially grateful to James Meador for the important help he provided, especially in the Regenstein archives.

32. Omeljan Pritsak, "Hans Heinrich Schaeder 31. Jan. 1896–13 März 1957: Ein Nekrolog," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 108 (1958): 39.

33. In Arthur R. Evans, *Four Modern Humanists: Hofmannsthal, Gundolf, Curtius, Kantorowicz* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), 69

34. See my "An Apology for S. D. Goitein," in *A Faithful Sea: The Religious Cultures the Mediterranean, 1200–1700*, ed. Adnan A. Husain and Katherine E. Fleming (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 173–99.

35. Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 210–11.

inexorable God."[36] Wach said of Schweitzer and Otto—as Kitagawa said of Wach himself—that they were the "masters of interpretation." Even in his postwar "Crisis of the University," speaking of Christ, Wach exhorted his audience to "work in the spirit of the Master."[37]

For Wach, George was even more, indeed: a prophet, king, master. Klaus Mann articulated this adulation for George:

> Each of his gestures was of an exemplary, programmatic character. . . . his romance [with] the boy Maximin was the core of a philosophy that was a revelation to the circle of disciples. . . . My youth venerated in Stefan George the Templar whose *mission* and deed is described in his poem. When the black wave of nihilism was threatening to devour our culture, he arrived, the militant seer and inspired knight."[38]

Wach visited and corresponded with Friedrich Gundolf (1880–1931), one of those disciples closest to George.[39] He frequented discussions with others in the circle, but Kitagawa notes that he was particularly influenced by Gundolf. Throughout his German career, Wach was immersed in philosophical and theological currents—Kierkegaard, Scheler, Dilthey, and Troeltsch loom largest. In 1923, Kierkegaard's tension between the aesthetic and the ethical took on particular cogency and urgency as the young Religionswissenschaft professor affiliated himself with the hyperaesthetic George Circle. In an essay on Dilthey in 1925, however, Wach tipped his hand, so to speak. The "sharpest critique" (*schärfste Kritik*) of Schleiermacher was that, he said, of a forthcoming work by "Gundolf."[40]

The culture of mastery transcended its rarefied form in the George cult. Friedrich Heiler, in his October 5, 1955, memorial delivered in Chicago's Bond Chapel, resoundingly invoked Wach in terms of master-disciple relations. The older scholar reported that when Wach came to the University of Munich after demobilization, he "became my disciple."[41] When Wach

36. Ibid.

37. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 168.

38. Emphasis added; http://www.androphile.org/preview/Library/Biographies/StefanGeorge/StefanGeorge.htm. On the homoerotic elements of the "Templar" image in the Georgean *imaginaire*, see Jan Steinhaussen, *Aristokraten aus Not und ihre "Philosophie der zu hoch hängenden Trauben": Nietzsche-Rezeption und literarische Produktion von Homosexuellen in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts: Thomas Mann, Stefan George, Ernst Bertram, Hugo von Hofmannsthal u.a.* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 259–68.

39. Lothar Helbing, Claus Victor Bock, and Karlhans Kluncker, eds., *Stefan George: Dokumente seiner Wirkung: Aus dem Friedrich-Gundolf-Archiv der Universität London* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1974).

40. Joachim Wach, "Wilhelm Dilthey über 'Das Problem der Religion,'" *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* 40 (1925): 70n3. The only other footnotes are to the Dilthey under discussion and to a forthcoming essay by Wach himself.

41. Friedrich Heiler, *Divinity School News* 22, no. 4 (1955): 28.

moved on to Leipzig, according to Heiler, "his special master became Hans Haas."[42] Heiler even praises the "two fine essays" in *Meister und Jünger* (misdating it to 1924) and then concludes—rather poignantly, in light of intervening decades—that "my disciple had become a great master from whom I could learn myself as his disciple."[43] Similarly, in his "Life and Thought of Joachim Wach," not only does Kitagawa explicitly "integrate" life and work, but he concludes that Wach "tried to combine" being both teacher and master *and* that he, Kitagawa, was disciple to his master Wach.[44]

In a Hyde Park essay, "Religion in America," Wach seemed to put the "master-disciple" relationship above that of father-son or of brother-brother, asserting that "religious life has given rise to the relation between master and disciple, perhaps the profoundest and most fruitful relationship between men even though there is no physical bond."[45] Kitagawa testifies to its *Sitz im Leben*:

> In Hyde Park he called himself *guru*. The History of Religions Club, referred to as his Sangha, recapitulated the George model of master-disciple Bund. Dr. Wach was always surrounded by students . . . deeply concerned with his students, not only with their academic development, but with their personal lives as well. In his pockets were always letters from former students. . . . Appropriately, he regarded himself as a guru . . . a combination of father-confessor, protector, and teacher. To him, the professor-student relationship was a sacred one.[46]

Not all witnesses considered this bonding to have been a wholly positive interest. His colleague Bernard M. Loomer provided this precious glimpse:

> Because of his gentleness . . . he did not insist with sufficient rigor that [his students] be extended closer to the limits of their intellectual resources in confronting some of the difficult problems within the field. It was extremely difficult for him to deny a student once he had committed himself to him, even though the student's work fell below the academic standard. With one part of his mind he could be quite clear about a student's mediocrity, while subconsciously his very

42. *Divinity School News* 22, no. 4 (1955): 29.

43. Ibid., 29, 31.

44. Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), xlvii.

45. Joachim Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 142. The date of this lecture is unknown.

46. Joseph Kitagawa, "A Glimpse of Professor Wach," *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 45, no. 4 (November 1955): 2.

nature, plus his involvement with the student, would cloud his perception and compromise his judgment.[47]

## Homosociality and the Mission of the Master

Wach's first publication, published in the same year as his thesis, *Der Erlösungsgedanke und seine Deutung*, does not appear in published bibliographies of his work.[48] This debut, the first one of his two "religio-sociological" essays in *Meister und Jünger*, appeared in 1922 in the first of the new series of *Freideutsche Jugend* just at that transitional moment in the *Jugendbewegung* when George and Blüher were enjoying a marked influence.[49]

Briefly stated, Wach seems to have been rather fully invested in Georgean ideology. He seems to have sympathized with extreme spin-off of the George group, the so-called Munich *Kosmiker* ideology and "lifestyle."[50] The Munich *Kosmiker*, as Van der Leeuw put it, "discovered the force of the life of passion [and] glorified the flesh over and above the nobility of the soul."[51] Van der Leeuw employed ironic metaphors to exemplify George's "Sexualmetaphysik." "Jahweh can only be served by those who know of Baal. To kneel down before the appearance of the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ can only be done by him who knows the flesh itself."[52]

47. Bernard M. Loomer, *Divinity School News* 22, no. 4 (1955): 28.

48. Wach first published "Meister und Jünger/Lehrer und Schüler," in *Freideutsche Jugend: Eine Monatsschrift aus dem Geiste der Jugend* in 1922, as noticed by Flasche. For the homosexual orientation of the journal, see Ulfried Geuter, *Homosexualität in der deutschen Jugendbewegung: Jungenfreundschaft und Sexualität im Diskurs von Jugendbewegung, Psychoanalyse und Jugendpsychologie am Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994). See Blüher's self-announcement [*Selbstanziege*] of his *Aristie* in *Freideutsche Jugend* 7 (1921): 162–64. By the time of the second installment of "Meister und Jünger," which came out as a booklet (*Buchlein*) in 1925, Wach could not have missed the virulence of Blüher's anti-Semitism. See, for example, Blüher's *Deutsches Reich, Judentum und Sozialismus: Eine Rede an die freideutsche Jugend* (Prien: Anthropos-V, 1920).

49. For the attention paid to questions of gender and homosexuality in the issues of *Freideutsche Jugend* (hereafter *FJ*) between 1915 and Wach's article of 1922, see (as listed in Geuter), for example: "Antifeminismus und wir Freidedeutsche. Fünf Beiträge," *FJ*3 (1917): 72–87; Marie Buchhold, "Gustav Wyneken," *FJ*7 (1921): 395–96; Elizabeth Busse-Wilson, "Der Charakter des Antifeminismus. Beobachtungen an hans Blüher," *FJ*7 (1921): 164–68; Adolf Günther, "Antifeminismus und wir Freidedeutsche" *FJ*2 (1916): 237–40; and Else Stroh, "Ueber Eros, Liebe und Ehe," *FJ*5 (1919): 309–13. The phenomenon was important enough to be noticed by the conservative publisher Diederichs: Eugen Diederichs, "Freideutsche Jugend und sexuelle Frage," *Die Tat* 11 (1920): 952.

50. See Richard Faber, "Der Schwabinger Imperatorenstreit, (k)ein Sturm in Wasserglas: Uber die Münchner Bohème im allgemeinen und die 'Kosmische Runde' im besondern," in *Kreise—Gruppen—Bünde: Zur Soziologie moderner Intellektuellenassoziation*, ed. Richard Faber and Christine Holste (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 37–65.

51. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 19.

52. Ibid., 28.

That Wach was predisposed to one of the *Kosmiker*, Ludwig Klages, is confirmed by other works. For example, Wach's 1924 rave review of Klages's *Kosmogonische Eros*, describes it as "a deeply probing and amply reflective book. . . . It would be nice if this positive book, which is read much already today in the circles of the German youth movement, is successful outside of Germany, particularly in the homeland of Bachofen [Switzerland] in which its author likewise resides."[53] Wach subsequently contributed to a Festschrift for Klages in 1932.[54]

Perhaps Wach's most concentrated statement of gendered politics—sometimes known today as "masculinist philosophy"—was expressed a year after the full version of "Master and Disciple" appeared.[55] The young scholar published a book review, "Henri de Montherlant ein Dichter des heroischen Lebens" (Henri de Montherlant, a Poet of the Heroic Life) in the 1926 *Preußische Jahrbücher*.[56] At the time of this article, Montherlant (b. 1896), at thirty-one, was only two years older than Wach but had long since established his celebrity while still in his teens with a hypermasculinist, homosocial, and proto-Fascist prose—writing as a participant in bullfighting and declaring a "philosophy of sport."[57] Wach declared that "youth groups in Europe today" ("Kreisen der Jugend Europas heute")" had a lively interest in

53. "Es ist weiter ein tiefschürfendes, gedankenreiches Buch. . . . Es ware schön, wenn dieses positive Buch, das schon heute in den Kreisen der deutschen Jugendbewegung viel gelesen wird, auch im Auslande bekannt würde, zumal im Heimatlande Bachofens, in dem auch sein Verfasser wohnhaft ist." *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* 39 (1924): 41–42.

54. Joachim Wach, "Typen d. Anthropologie," in *Die Wissenschaft am Scheidewege von Leben und Geist: Festschrift Ludwig Klages zum 60* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1932), 240–48.

55. See Ann Goldberg, "The Black Jew with the Blond Heart: Friedrich Gundolf, Elisabeth Salomon, and Conservative Bohemianism in Weimar Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 79 (2007): 306n1, for secondary literature on this subject.

56. Joachim Wach, "Henri de Montherlant ein Dichter des heroischen Lebens," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 209, Heft 2 (January 1926): 196–200. Montherlant became a dramatist and novelist compromised by collaboration with the Vichy regime. This dimension of his career has now been treated in Richard J. Golsan, *French Writers and the Politics of Complicity: Crises of Democracy in the 1940s and 1990s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), chap. 1, "Henry de Montherlant: Deception and the Wages of Ambivalence," pp. 21–52. For present purposes, Montherlant's widely discussed Fascism is perhaps less apposite than is his pederastic ideology, elaborated in Pierre Sipriot, ed., *Henry de Montherlant—Roger Peyrefitte: Correspondance* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1983), which describes, among other things, Montherlant, in his midforties, having an affair with a fourteen-year-old boy. See the entry by Wayne R. Dynes on Montherlant in the *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality* (New York: Garland, 1990), 833. Wach seems to pick up on this orientation in his discussion of Montherlant's "Le dialogue avec Gérard": "Ein Gespräch zwischen einem Zweiundzwanzigjährigen und einem Zwölfjährigen, wie ein Präludium der Gedanken, die die Helden seiner späteren Schriften tauschen" (197).

57. Wach, "Henri de Montherlant," 196. It is likely that Wach had recently read Schaeder's "Die islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen, ihre Herfunkt und ihre dichterische Gestaltung" *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 79 (1925): 193–268. Schaeder and Wach were well acquainted. Wach's *Die Typenlehre Trendelenburgs und ihr Einfluß auf Dilthey. Eine philosophie- und geistesgeschichtl. Studie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1926) was dedicated to Schaeder. Wach later cited Schaeder's "Die islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen" on more than one occasion. The implications of their discourse on the perfect man I must leave for another occasion.

Montherlant.[58] Wach furthermore extols Montherlant's conservative world-view ("konservativer Zug beherrscht die Weltanschauung Montherlants") and, finally, pronounces de Montherlant to be a "bold herald . . . of youth struggling for a new humanity."[59]

A participant in these events recalled that in Leipzig "Wach regularly once a week had over to his place some younger friends, with whom he read George."[60] Flasche gives another example according to "oral information from a participant" that "Wach belonged to this circle and held to its tradition in its Leipziger incarnation, by holding frequent readings with pupils and the likeminded."[61] His student Schoeps and his comrade Frommel recorded firsthand reactions to this group in letters written at the time.[62]

While extrapolating the George Circle model into a general sociology of religion may seem surprising, Wach left no doubt of it in the final words of *Meister und Jünger*, where he asserts "the concrete revelation of the 'power' of the master, the power of which Goethe spoke when he said that God continually remains active in higher nature in order to draw the inferior near unto himself."[63] The "power of the master" "over the inferior" thus was epitomized by Stefan George, their own Master, whom they called their "Führer."

Wach's homosociality was bold and even thoroughgoing, though never explicit.[64] However, in private—for example, in a strangely obsequious May 1925 letter to Gundolf—he could be almost unmistakable, asking the senior colleague whether he, Wach, ought to dedicate his book to a certain friend.[65]

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I will say here only that "Die islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen" became one of the more influential Orientalist essays. Thomas Mann, to cite just one example, cribbed directly from this essay in the prologue to *Joseph and His Brothers*.

58. Wach, "Henri de Montherlant," 196. "Sein Ideal ist die Vereinigung von 'force' und 'grâce' in einer Jugend . . . der Einheit von Kraft und von Gemut."

59. "So ist H. de Monterlant mehr als ein interessanter Einzelner,—vielleicht der begeisterte und kühne Herold einer jungen und kräftigen, im Zeichen alter, heiliger Symbole um neues Menschentum ringenden Jugend." Wach, "Henri de Montherlant," 200.

60. See 1931–32 letters of Wolfgang Frommel, alias Lothar Helbing, describing Wach in Leipzig at that time.

61. "Zu diesem Kreis gehörte Wach und hielt an dessen Tradition in seinen Leipziger Jahren fest, indem er häufige auch mit Schülern und Gleichgesinnten Lesungen hiel," as reported "mündliche Information eines der Teilnehmer," in Flasche, *Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs*, 14.

62. In Julius H. Schoeps, ed., *Im Streit um Kafka und das Judentum: der Briefwechsel zwischen Max Brod und Hans-Joachim Schoeps* (Königstein im Taunus.: Jüdischer Verlag bei Athenäum, 1985), February 11, 1932, letter 22, p. 72.

63. Wach, "Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies," 32.

64. Thus, for example, in *Meister und Jünger*, he invokes Pausanias, a proponent of a pederastic pedagogy, in Plato's *Symposium*.

65. "Glauben Sie, dass ich es wagen kann, ein Exemplar des bescheidenen Büchleins [i.e., *Meister und Jünger*] dem Manne zu übersenden, dessen Gestalt mir bei der Abfassung so oft vor der Seele stand, dessen Werk meine heisse Liebe und Bewunderung gilt?" The booklet was dedicated "An Hans Erbler." In Helbing,

Commitment to the ardently masculinist youth movement; reading, reviewing, and favorably citing sexological treatises by Klages and Blüher; ecstatically reviewing Montherlant; favoring the George circle, it seems, his entire adult life: *Männerbunde* in life and "masculinism" in thought encompassed his homocentric social world.[66] While Wach only alludes to an unstated cosmology of sex, still, he carried out his German career in intimate proximity to the briefly burgeoning "homosexual emancipation movement"—to which, unsurprisingly, he did not declare public allegiance.

## *Hauptjünger*

The chief disciples of George, Wolfskehl and Gundolf, provided (veiled) models for discipleship, to the end of Wach's life. Their roles in turn were calques, respectively, on those of the chief disciples (*Hauptjünger*) of Jesus, the apostles Peter and John. In the code of the George *Kreis*, "Wolfskehl was George's Peter and Gundolf . . . was his John" ("Wolfskehl der Petrus Georges genannt, Gundolf aber . . . sein Johannes").[67] *Meister und Jünger* used the examples of Peter and John as being unquestionably primary. In Wach's words, "Jesus went out and called those whom he wanted to draw unto himself: *Follow me!* It has been justifiably emphasized that by using this means of selection, Jesus promoted a principle of selection in which the choice was not based on personal worth but in which a fellowship of destiny predominated."[68] This paradigmatic *Beruf*, John 1, "Folge mir nach!" likewise is emphasized by Blüher in the passage in his *Aristie* on which Wach bases his passage.[69] Wach's encoding is here underscored by his note on this passage. Citing Blüher's "Jüngerlehre" chapter in *Aristie*, Wach followed Blüher in his repeated stress on Peter and John as

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Bock, and Kluncker, *Stefan George: Dokumente seiner Wirkung*, 273–74, the editors observe that "Wach entfaltete eine fruchtbare Lehr- und Forschertätigkeit und stand mit seinen Studenten in einem persönlichen Kontakt." Wach appears in Gundolf's guestbook for 1930. See Lothar Helbing and Claus Victor Bock, eds., *Gundolf Briefe: Neue Folge* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1965), 262. "Lothar Helbing was the pseudonym of Wolfgang Frommel, with whom Wach read George. This relationship explains the comment that Wach was associated with Verlag der Runde "zu letzt"; "Lothar Helbing," as editor of the volume in which this editorial comment appears, would likely have been its source if not its author.

66. Andrew Hewitt, "The Philosophy of Masculinism," in *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 79–130.

67. Flasche, *Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs*, 15n9, citing Franz Schonauer, *Stefan George in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1960), 92; confirmed by Kurt Hildebrandt, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George und seinen Kreis* (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1965), 199.

68. Wach, "Master and Disciple: Two Religio-Sociological Studies," 21.

69. *Aristie*, "Gestalten der Hauptjünger," 80.

*Hauptjünger*.[70] Wach similarly made this point that same year, in "Mahāyāna Buddhism": "Can anyone doubt that a report on Jesus by Peter would have been different—would have had to be different from one by John or Andrew or by any of the other disciples?"[71] In "The Concept of the 'Classical' in the Study of Religions" (1937), Wach returns to the point that Peter and John are named first, followed by "Thomas and Judas." In this instance he employs the phrase "the figures stand before us very vividly."[72] Here he uses phrasing similar to those in his letter to Gundolf (referring presumably to Hans Erbler, to whom *Meister und Jünger* was dedicated). It is striking that, even in his later orthodoxy, Wach persisted in basing his theology of mastery on apocryphal gospels.[73] In any case, Wach's Georgean orientation in some sense crossed over from Leipzig to Hyde Park.

This is, I think, for those interested in understanding Wach, no small thing. *Meister und Jünger* was an *erotophany*, a masculinist manifesto, an oblique pledge of Georgean allegiance.[74] That it was written coterminously with *Verstehen* sets out what became a double trajectory in Wach's career. The purely academic face survived 1935. His later fame rested squarely on (translations of) his pre-1935 scholarship. The vision of the private Wach, however, remained tacitly in force. So the original double Wach remained, though with only one of his faces animated. It is important to note Wach's continuing later citings of his *Meister und Jünger*.[75] Not only did he continue to cite this monograph, but he also continued to think, more generally, in terms of a culture of mastery.[76]

70. The first such example seems to be *Aristie*, 187, in the section titled "Gestalten der Hauptjünger," first note.

71. Wach, *Essays*, 45.

72. Wach, *Types of Religious Experience*, 55

73. Joachim Wach, review of R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries*, *Journal of Religion* 31, no. 4 (October 1951): 308. Wach criticizes him for simplifying the importance of "who is in and who is out of the true ecclesia."

74. Analogously, Furness says of Klages, "There was nothing classical or religious for him which did not have some connection with Eros. . . . His hedonistic-heathen philosophy, which abhorred anything which smacked of morality, stemmed from a homo-erotic attitude, something feminine and atavistic, which was only interested in masculine strength." Furness, *Zarathustra's Children*, 77.

75. "The Concept of the 'Classical'" uses materials on discipleship which Wach had published in 1930 in the proceedings of an international meeting in Lund, which in turn largely derived from *Meister und Jünger*. See "Die Gestalten der Hauptjünger in den Stifterreligionen," in *Actes du 5e Congrès international d'histoire des religions à Lund, 27–29. août 1929* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1930), 78–81. These works may have influenced his student Schoeps. See Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Gottheit und Menschheit: Die grossen Religionsstifter und ihre Lehren* (Bergisch Gladbach: G. Lübbe, 1982), n119.

76. Both Klages and George modeled for Wach a posture of mastery that looked harshly on its inferiors. Theodor Lessing (writer, youthful friend of Klages, and best known for his *Jewish Self-Hatred*) recounts walking with Klages and George, and coming across a drunken old man. Klages: "There is no more blissful end for the wretch than an intoxicated demise." George: "The shadow of a tree is more important than the death of this insect." Cited in Furness, *Zarathustra's Children*, 99.

## "The Great Movement of the Present Day towards Integration"

To recapitulate, at the beginning of Wach's career, two works—*Meister und Jünger* in 1925 and *Verstehen* in 1926—carved out a two-track trajectory. In the subsequent, crucial decade of his German career, 1925–35, he consistently moved toward a public "integration" of the ideals interpreted respectively in these two studies. Wach integrated (or meant to integrate) Master and Interpreter into the Master-Interpreter. Although this public convergence remained in place to the end of his life, its private bifurcation also remained. Wach explicitly attempted to synthesize Master and Interpreter—in his favorite term, to "integrate" them—and indications in the published record suggest that he believed himself to have succeeded.

Wach championed the ideal of integrated master before and after 1935, in both his Georgean "pagan" and Episcopalian Christian modes. This double track, however, belied a deeper and substantive integration. Such harmonization was possible, perhaps, but at quite a cost—the cost of posterity. His championing the Master-Interpreter sustained a center that could not hold. To vary the metaphor, this effort—a flash in the overheated Weimar pan—brilliantly but ephemerally fused his professional and private lives. The quick, near-universal abandonment of the Wachian program after his death would seem to support the conclusion that his fiery amalgam lost most of its rational coherence when it went cold.

He unequivocally promoted the virtues of unity and integration: "Personal experience has aided the author in realizing the vital importance and significance of *religion as an integrating factor* in human society and in understanding its function in the contemporary crisis of civilization in East and West."[77] The "integration of the religious group has been the subject of [sociology of religion],"[78] "the integrating function of a common religious experience."[79] *Cultus* is "total response of the total being—intense and integral—to Ultimate Reality, in *action*."[80] You cannot effectively "understand" the "integration" of the "master" unless, in some sense, you are one yourself.

## Conservative Revolution

In the August 1930 issue of *Die literarische Welt*, another keen observer of the George phenomenon, Walter Benjamin, published a scathing review of

77. The crisis of civilization would recall for the learned reader such works as Albert Schweitzer's *Philosophy of Civilization* (1923).

78. Wach, *Comparative Study of Religion*, 127.

79. Ibid., 128.

80. Ibid., 98, emphasis in original.

a prototypical Georgean tome.[81] Benjamin begins his review trenchantly: "If there were such a thing as a German conservatism worth its salt, it would have to regard this book as its Magna Carta." The term "Conservative Revolution" had just been coined by Hugo Von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929), whose plays Wach performed at the Wach family's Dresden estate.[82] Von Hofmannsthal was a mutual friend of Wach's friend, Hans Heinrich Schaeder. Hofmannsthal's daughter, Christiane, married Heinrich Zimmer, an Indologist close to some of the same circles.[83] Examples could be multiplied; as Wilhelm has noted, "Everyone in the circles devoted to *Geist* and *Kunst* knew everyone else."[84] Hans Freyer is the most important conservative ideologue of his close Leipzig colleagues, but Felix Krueger, Theodor Litt, and Carl Schmitt should also be mentioned.[85] Freyer's biographer Üner includes Wach among their leaders. Hans-Joachim Schoeps, who identified himself as, respectively, "Preuße, Konservativer, Jude," came to study in Leipzig with Wach.[86] These all shared an interest in things Prussian.[87] Freyer and Schoeps in fact wrote books on

81. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith, and Paul Mattick, eds., *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, vol. 2, *1927–1934* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996–2003), 378–85.

82. Ibid., 378.

83. See Hans-Heinrich Schaeder, "In Memoriam Hugo von Hofmannsthal," *Hofmannsthal-Blatter* 31–32 (1985): 32–51, and "Hugo von Hofmannsthal/Hans Heinrich Schaeder: Die Briefe," ed. Rudolf Hirsch, *Hofmannsthal-Blatter* 31–32 (1985): 3–31. Schaeder wrote to Hofmannsthal praising Zimmer to the proverbial sky. Hofmannsthal's son-in-law Zimmer shortly thereafter became one of the stimuli that set Eranos rolling; he was rewarded with the first talk at its first meeting. See the translation in Heinrich Zimmer, "On the Significance of the Indian Tantric Yoga," in Joseph Campbell, ed., *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks 4* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960):3–59.

84. Richard Wilhelm, introduction to his translation of *An Exceptional Friendship: The Correspondence of Thomas Mann and Erich Kahler*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), vii. Thus Zimmer and Schaeder knew Hofmannsthal, who in turn had been closely associated with George for a time.

85. "Freyer and his circle of friends among whom were Theodor Litt, Joachim Wach, Felix Krueger, and Carl Schmitt." Muller, *God That Failed*, 280–85. Wach worked with Freyer in Leipzig and taught in his institute. Freyer sociology's (*Soziologie als Wirklichkeitswissenschaft. Logische Grundlegung des Systems der Soziologie* [1930]; *Einleitung in die Soziologie* [1931]). He also shared with Wach an interest in theology and *Lebensphilosophie*. Hans Freyer's best-known work in English is *Theory of Objective Mind and an Introduction to the Philosophy of Culture*, trans. Steven Grosby (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1998).

86. Hans-Joachim Schoeps, "J. W.s wiss. Bedeutung," *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 9 (1957): 368–71. Teacher and student shared an interest in the Basel historian Jakob Burckhardt. Joachim Wach, "Jacob Burckhardt und die Religionsgeschichte," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 42 (1927): 97–115, and Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Gestalten an der Zeitenwend: Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Kafka* (Berlin: Vortrupp, 1936). Eventually Schoeps also worked in world religions; Hans-Joachim Schoeps, ed., *Die grossen Religionen der Welt: Christentum, Judentum, Islam, Buddhismus, [Philosophie] China[s], Hinduismus* (Munich: Droemer, 1958). In English he published *The World's Great Religions*. Schoeps, however, may have leaned too heavily on his teacher. In his book review of Schoeps's *Gottheit und Menschheit: Die grossen Religionsstifter und ihre Lehren*, Noah Edward Fehl observed, "The major part of it is lifted, with the phrases intact, from [van der Leeuw] and from Wach's 'Meister und Jünger.'" *Journal of Religion* 31, no. 2 (April 1951): 151.

87. Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Preussen: Geschichte eines Staates* (Berlin: Propylaeen Verlag, 1967). Both were deeply conservative, both were active in the youth movements, and both blessed the marriage of *Religions-* and

Prussians.[88] Wach was especially close to Hans Freyer, one of the key ideologues of the Conservative Revolution, of whom Wolf Lepenies flatly states that "Hans Freyer, with such writings as the *Revolution of the Right* (1932), was among those who created a climate in which National Socialism could flourish."[89] While not a member of the Nazi party, Freyer was responsible for the Nazi dismantling of his professional organization: "The name of Hans Freyer is inseparably associated with the discontinuance of the German Sociological Society (DGS) in 1934."[90] Imagine, then, the parallel professional and personal pressure that went into Wach's own apology for his budding discipline, "Sinn und Aufgabe," published the following year, 1935.[91] As was the case with his teacher Heiler, his friend Hans Freyer remained committed to the very system of higher education that was expelling Wach. Felix Krueger (1874–1948), following a nearby but divergent path, was another close colleague on the faculty at Leipzig. Like Freyer a conservative revolutionary, Krueger was eventually encouraged to retire, under pressure that he could not prove the Aryan purity of his lineage.[92] Prior to his retirement, he fought vigorously to prove himself worthy of the new regime, continuing to agitate for it right up until his eventual dismissal.

## From Leipzig to Hyde Park

After his emigration to the United States, Wach's lifework kept widening in two directions at once, and he appears to have been unable to moderate that bifurcation. Hermann Broch identified such a doubleness in "[Stefan] George's lyric poetry, born of the monstrous tension between a will to total assertion of being [*Seins-Aussage*] and just as strong a will to total ego suppression

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*Geistesgeschichte*. Other exiled Georgean scholars, such as Erich Auerbach (head of the Prussian state library), Ernst Morwitz (lifelong advocate of George, and a Prussian state judge), and Ernst Kantorowicz, were Prussian nationalists. Schoeps's son Julius Schoeps, an anti-Semitism expert and founding director of the Jewish Museum in Vienna, heads the Moses Mendelssohn Center at Potsdam University and coedits *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte*, the journal cofounded by his father.

88. Hans Freyer, *Preussentum und Aufklärung und andere Studien zu Ethik und Politik*, ed. Elfriede Üner (Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986).

89. Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*, trans, R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 346.

90. Ibid., 345.

91. Joachim Wach, "Sinn und Aufgabe der Religionswissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* 50 (1935): 193–201.

92. At the University of Halle Web site, a short biography of Kreuger includes the following: "1919/20 nahm er an den Kämpfen des Leipziger Zeitfreiwilligenregiments gegen die kommunistischen Aufstände teil. Während der gesamten Zeit der Weimarer Republik hielt er Vorträge in deutsch-völkischen bzw. rechtsextremistischen Zirkeln und Vereinen. Als das Sächsische Volksbildungsministerium ihm Ende der 1920er Jahre untersagte, eine Brandrede gegen den Versailler Vertrag an der Universität zu halten, hielt Krueger sie—geschützt

[*Ich-Verschweigung*]."[93] A similar tension intensified during Wach's Hyde Park years. He reimagined his *Religionswissenschaft* as "History of Religions," converted from a radical George *Kreis* erotocentrism to a vigorously missionary Episcopalianism, and moved from one youth movement to another—that is, from the Bundist *Jugendbewegung* to the World Federation of Christian Students.

## Understanding Judaism

In all of the preceding, and from the outset, the aspiring professor of religion had his own Jewish problem. Given his background, the particular horrors of his times, and his grand claims to interreligious understanding, it is eminently reasonable to ask whether the Wach of *Verstehen* himself "understood" Judaism. Here the answer must be at least a qualified no. Although he wrote a monograph on Buddhism and several essays on Islam, he wrote nothing sustained on Judaism.[94] In one (untranslated) note of *Meister und Jünger*, he did devote a paragraph to Jewish ideas of the holy man.[95] And he did, in his final years, touch on the self-understanding of rabbinic Judaism but only, as in *Sociology of Religion*, out of what today appears as typological obligation. In fact, the majority of his treatments of Judaism are stereotypical, theologically driven, and almost invariably negative.

I take some early examples. The finale of Blüher's *Aristie*, a source for Wach's *Meister und Jünger*, swarms with theological anti-Semitism, deploying such terms as the Jewish Problem ("Judenproblem," 302), Jewish half-breeds ("Juden mischlingen," 302), the "typically pharisaical" ("typisch pharisäischen," 307), "a pharisaical type" ("pharisäischen Typus," 313).[96] We learn furthermore that Jews are cultural mimics (314) and parasites (320): these themes culminate in a discussion of sacrificial death and the disciples of Christ (314–15).[97] Even

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durch Leibwächter des NS-Studentenbundes—in einem kommunistisch geprägten Arbeiterviertel." See http://www.catalogus-professorum-halensis.de/kruegerfelix.html (accessed September 18, 2006). For his relations with Freyer and Wach, and their political involvements, see the extensive documentation provided by Muller, *God That Failed*, esp. 73–78.

93. Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time: The European Imagination, 1860–1920*, trans., ed., and with an introduction by Michael P. Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 99.

94. It lies beyond the scope of the present essay to analyze the essays on Buddhism and Islam; suffice to say that they are not the results of original research.

95. Wach, *Meister und Jünger*, 72n50.

96. In his talk at Chicago Bond Chapel, "The Paradox of the Gospel," he speaks of "two perennial and ubiquitous types . . . designated here as needing the preaching of the Gospel." Reprinted in *Understanding and Believing*, 87.

97. The book is framed by pages of capitalized poetry at either end. On p. 325, this end page includes the following. HEUTET EUCH VOR DEM GESCHLAGENEN VOLKE DAS DEN MOND ZUM ZEICHEN HAT UND DAS SCHLACKE

though Wach's family on both the maternal and paternal lines had been Christian for several generations, Blüher's racialism of purity and "Mischling," popular in his social circles, might nevertheless have unnerved a scion of the (in)famous Mendelssohns in the early 1920s. To the certain dismay of any Jewish descendant who proudly chose Christ over those who killed him, racial science rendered blood descent escapable neither by conversion nor by patriotism, neither by theology nor by university prestige.

From the time of his earliest works, such as "Bemerkungen zum Problem der 'extremen' Würdigung der Religion," published in 1923, Wach employed classical anti-Jewish derogations and misnomers, including the trope of the Pharisees[98] and characterized early Christianity in terms of "the messianic speculations of Late Judaism" ("spätjudischen Messiasspekulation).[99] His 1930 piece on theology of history concluded with a reference to Judaism as a type of "oriental" religion that influenced Christianity. He not only repeated the phrase "the Jew whom the letter killeth" but also invoked "the exclusively stern judge of the Talmud."[100] Indeed, in most cases when he cited Judaism it was by way of tendentious contrast: "The Hebrew *Qahal* is of the type of natural grouping based on ties of blood whereas the Buddhist Samgha [*saṃgha*] resembles much more closely the ecclesia by being a *specifically* religious association."[101] He speaks of Bible scholarship but sees Israelites as predecessors and so never discusses the Hebrew Bible as foreign. Supercessionism ruled his Jewish studies. When he published his 1931 *Sociology of Religion* in English translation in 1943, he asserted theological beliefs as if they were sociological data: "Thus the religious and ethical teachings of the prophets of the Old Testament can be interpreted as being preparations for the replacement of the religion of the collective law by the New Testament religion of personal justification by means of faith and works."[102]

His later comments on Judaism were not notably more evolved. In his tribute "To a Rabbi Friend" (written 1935–45), he posited the theological cliché

IM BLUTE FUEHRT. WER SICH MIT IHNEN MISCHT DER IST GERICHTET. KEHRT ABER EIN ZU GAST BEI DEM EWIGEN JUDEN DENN ER WEISS VIEL.

98. Joachim Wach, "Bemerkungen zum Problem der 'extremen' Würdigung d. Religion," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 38 (1923): 163.

99. Ibid., 163, 169.

100. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 90.

101. Ibid., 81.

102. Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 310. The fuller passage makes clear that this is more than just theology thinly guised as science. The "new religious experience" of the "universal religions" produced a "transformed attitude toward reality in all its aspects . . . brought by great inspired leaders" who thereby "supersede the performance of cultic duties" with "elements of personal religion"; in Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, 310. From one angle, this is Lutheran, so to speak, to the nth degree. More than its Protestantization of the science of religion, however, is its nicely simultaneous assertion of universal law, law at once historical and divine.

of a Judaism outside of history: "The religious tradition of the Hebrew people has *miraculously* survived."[103] In the same talk, he seems at once to allude to his family's ancestral efforts on behalf of emancipation and to dissociate himself from them: "Modern man is the happy heir to a fight for freedom which his fathers waged against the dead weight of superstition and tyranny." Only once that I know of did he acknowledge publicly the Holocaust that ruined the lives of his loved ones. He referred to it blandly as the "years of tribulation which brought in their wake persecution and suffering for millions of Jews and Christians." This minimization by generalization—"persecution and suffering"—might seem to some to be inadequate as characterization of the historical reality at hand. To be sure, it is hard to imagine Wach's ordeal, to inherit wealth, position, cultural dominance, only to have it all brutally stripped away.[104] Instructively, he did not blame this fate on his beloved Germany. He uttered hardly a word of the Shoah, even though his mother and sister had suffered at its hands. The loyalties and sensibilities of his youth stayed with him, it would seem.

In "The Paradox of the Gospel," an undated talk Wach delivered (between 1945 and 1955) at the University of Chicago's Bond Chapel, he preached against "two perennial and ubiquitous *types*" who oppose the Gospel: the Jew and the Greek. The first type, he hastened immediately to clarify, refers to all kinds of people, and not literally Jews. In other words, in a pattern that we shall see again, he meant Jews but not Jews.

## Being a Mendelssohn

Ziolkowski nicely noted that, in the opening chapter of his 1924 *Religionswissenschaft*, "Emanzipation der Religionswissenschaft," Wach "forgot" his own heritage—that of the emancipation of European Jewry, which located Moses Mendelssohn very much at the fore.[105] In his programmatic lecture "Sinn und Aufgabe" (1935), Wach confessed apotropaically "how difficult it is for us to comprehend the piety of our predecessors of perhaps only a few decades."[106]

103. Christian Wedemeyer has kindly noted that "in the book prospectus found in the archives (box 2.10; penned, I think, by Kitagawa) this article is only called 'Note to a Jewish Rabbi'!" Personal communication, March 3, 2008. The published version appeared in *Understanding and Believing*, under the title "To a Rabbi Friend," 181–84.

104. In Hyde Park, the aristocrat first lived in a "modest room" in the Disciples Divinity House at 1156 East Fifty-seventh Street.

105. The original version was Joachim Wach, *Religionswissenschaft: Prolegomena zu ihrer wissenschaftstheoretischen Grundlegung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924), 1–20. See Eric J. Ziolkowski, "Wach, Religion, and 'The Emancipation of Art,'" *Numen* 4 (1999): 345–70.

106. Translation in Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 133.

This is interesting in light of what he had written the year before: "We *are not interested here in asking* to what extent philosophical speculation in that period appeared as a function of the emancipation from the views and value systems of *the hereditary religion* that had already occurred in practical life."[107] Professedly uninterested in understanding historically the historical phenomenon of emancipation, he sought nonetheless to ward off its threat. "There is a growing understanding in the West that the emancipation from religion in one sphere after another has had *some extremely serious and pernicious consequences*."[108]

For (unresearchable) reasons, Joachim Wach was silent on the paradoxes that this antiemancipatory antagonism evoked. The fabulous privileges possessed by his family for well over a century emerged directly out of the emancipation, but Wach seemed pointedly uninterested in the irony. His own "scientific existence," so to speak, was a consequence of the emancipation, but it presumably was one that he did not consider to be "extremely serious and pernicious." In any event, in 1935, within a year of writing those words, he was forcibly faced with the irony—and yet, even then, he did not come to grips with it. His chief Chicago disciple could not quite see it either. Wach, said Kitagawa, "inherited an irenic attitude in religious matters from his family and environment . . . the spirit of *Nathan der Weise* [for whom Moses Mendelssohn was said to be the model] lives in Wach's family to this day."[109] Kitagawa also told the story of Wach remarking in a social setting that "that piece [of music] always make me proud of my great-grandfather [i.e., Felix Mendelssohn]."[110] What Kitagawa did not say was that Wach, otherwise writing at white heat, greeted 1929, the great jubilee year for *Moses* Mendelssohn, with silence.[111]

But silence was not enough to protect him. He was battered by the genetic curse of the Mendelssohns. Leo Strauss was Wach's colleague at Chicago from 1949 to 1955. In 1962, Strauss gave a lecture at the University of Chicago titled "Why We Remain Jews." In this lecture he cited "Heinrich Heine, the well-known poet," to the effect that "'Judaism is not a religion, but a misfortune.' The conclusion from this premise is obvious, let us get rid of it as fast as we can and as painlessly as we can. But it is impossible not to remain a Jew. It is impossible to run away from one's origin."[112] For Wach, certainly, it was impossible not to remain a Mendelssohn. Even after this heritage ruined his German professoriate, during his Hyde Park years, Wach kept legal control

107. Translation in ibid., 31, emphasis added.

108. Wach, *Comparative Study of Religion*, 139, emphasis added.

109. Ibid., xxxv.

110. Kitagawa, "A Glimpse of Professor Wach"; see note 46, 1.

111. Some of the papers that emerged from the Jubilee year are conveniently translated in Alfred Jospe, *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981).

112. Leo Strauss, "Why We Remain Jews," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 313.

over variously valuable Mendelssohn heirlooms; he was literally the curator of his own heritage.[113]

## The History of Religions Club as *Saṃgha*

The graduate students in the History of Religions program at the University of Chicago Divinity School formed a History of Religions Club that Wach nicknamed the Sangha.[114] The *saṃgha* model of Buddhist community clearly was one of Wach's academic favorites, insofar as he adduced it on a number of occasions. In "Religion in America," he attributed to it a religious power, a "consciousness of the numinous character inherent in the religious communion . . . [including] the *samgha*."[115] "Yet, a feeling for the unity of the *saṃgha* does exist; and more than in the case of these previously discussed religions, the individual Buddhist does 'represent' the ideal that integrates the *saṃgha*."[116] In Hyde Park, it might be said, Joachim Wach became his own Stefan George with his own *Kreis*.

For a brief decade, Wach became the Master to the Chicago students who were his disciples. On the other hand, it was now clear that, for whatever academic success he enjoyed, he was not, in fact, in any larger sense than his tiny *saṃgha*, going to become the imperious Master of his original (if implicit) aspirations. For larger purposes he did retool his presumptions of mastery into a generalized elitist idiom of anti-Bolshevism. Thus he claimed that only "formulators," the truly creative—as contrasted with the "proletariat"—have the truly significant religious experiences. In this way he contrasted the "stereotypical experience of the average man" with the "paradigmatic experiences of the great *homines religiosi*."[117]

113. That Wach conserved family-held documents, see Jeffrey S. Sposato "Creative Writing: The [Self-] Identification of Mendelssohn as Jew," *Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 190–209. There exists some confusion as to whether Wach had the "Heyse" diary of Felix Mendelssohn; see Jeffrey S. Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation: Felix Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 25. See also Eric Werner, "Mendelssohn Sources," *Notes*, 2nd ser., vol. 12, no. 2 (March 1955): 201: "I wish here to express my deep gratitude to many members of the Mendelssohn family [including] Joachim Wach, of the University of Chicago, and his gracious sister." In 1949 Wach "lent a collection of Lessing items for a Goethe exhibition put on by the Germanics Department in collaboration with the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. The Lessing items had recently been brought to this country; for many years they had been in the Mendelssohn family." See also H. Stefan Schultz, "The Unknown Manuscript of 'Emilia Galotti' and Other Lessingiana," *Modern Philology* 47, no. 2 (November 1949): 88–97, esp. 88.

114. As Kitagawa wrote: "Basically he was happiest when surrounded by his own students, the so-called *Sangha*," in Wach, *Essays*, xix.

115. Wach, *Essays*, 140.

116. Ibid., 156.

117. Wach, *Comparative Study of Religions*, 59.

His deeper sensitivities only occasionally revealed themselves. Kitagawa reported, rather cryptically, that while stationed on the Baltic Sea, in "this icy, windy outpost, a young soldier lost his nerve and committed suicide. Wach was the soldier's officer and felt his own inadequacy in not being able to cope with the difficult human situation which estranged man from his Maker and from his fellow man."[118] Many years later, according to Sangha member Kees Bolle, a "friend" once found him weeping in his Swift Hall office.[119] The exiled professor said that he had been thus affected by reading Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

*Wach was a tragic figure*. The epigraph to his "Problem of Death in Modern Philosophy," taken from Simmel, thus seems pointedly apt: "It is astonishing how few of the pains of men have passed into their philosophy."[120] I cannot help but recall that Wach lugubriously saw the Georgean master as "the lonely one." Wach was a tragically divided soul, as in the words with which he concludes *Sociology of Religion*, "No better formula has been found for man's ultimate longing than Augustine's '*Cor nostrum inquietum est donec requiescat in te*.' 'Our heart is without rest until it finds it in Thee.'"[121]

## Reflections on the Fate of Wach's German Career

Joachim Wach believed in the integration of the life and the work: "No man's work will be better than the man himself."[122] In integrating the man with the work, the Master with the Interpreter, Wach faced complex and inescapable challenges. These included Fascism (his intellectual affinities and affiliations with men of the Conservative Revolution, and others of the far right, up to and including eventual Nazis—Krueger, Spranger, Freyer, Klages, Montherlant, Blüher, and others), homosexuality (his involvements in *Jugendbewegung*, the George Circle, his masculinist philosophy), and Judaism (ancestry destroyed his fortune and fame, his German career, his dreams, and almost destroyed his immediate family). It is uncontestable that these modes of identity thrived in circles very close to him. The life-versus-work problem therefore was more than a theoretical issue for Wach. To be sure, he was not a Fascist, and not a Jew, and not publicly homosexual. But these social worlds

118. Ibid., xix.

119. Kees W. Bolle, "Wach's Legacy: Reflexions on a New Book," *History of Religions* 10 (1970): 86–87.

120. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 50, where he cites it as deriving from "Simmel, *Fragments and Essays*, 17."

121. Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, 376.

122. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 161.

nevertheless interpenetrated his intellectual, academic, and spiritual worlds. And it was the "signature of the age" to deal with them all at once, as it were. In 1981, Helmut Schelsky recalled, in reference to Wach's friend Freyer, that "there arose a *synthesis of poetical and philosophic, scientific and literary, political and polemical 'worlds of expression'* (Benn) that constituted the 'signature of the age'—and this independently of whether one was a 'democrat' or what kind of democrat one was."[123]

The Life, burdened as it was with such blurring of boundaries, necessarily, importantly, and inextricably informed the Work. One consequence is that we are left with an impression, then, not of authority but rather of tragedy. It would be more than unfair to blame Wach for the seemingly endless identity crisis of religious studies, but he did exemplify what we retrospectively see as its foundational instabilities. Wach infiltrated theology into a new science of religions as answer to the calling of an eschatological "Herr der Wende." His personal *Wende,* his switch of denominations, put passion into his public theologizing, but in so doing it also overwhelmed his scientific calling. This imbalance is, I believe—following Rudolph, Werblowsky, and others—one compelling explanation for the neglect of his lifework. There are varieties of silence.[124] Silence, like speech, can be performative. Traumatized from all directions, Wach answered his enforced break from his heritage, his language, his youth, his cohort, his own body, with a willed silence. In his dissection of the George cult, Walter Benjamin posed an alternative: "Our task is to seize [today] by the horns so that we can interrogate the past. It is the bull whose blood must fill the grave if the spirits of the departed are to appear at its edge. *It is this deadly thrust of ideas that is absent from the works of the George circle.* . . . A critique that is nothing but vision loses its way, and *deprives literature of the interpretation it owes it,* and of the right to grow."[125]

Nothing less than *Verstehen* was at stake. Benjamin explains, as if referring to Wach, that "'interpretation' has undergone an inversion . . . conferring on it not the false life of empathy but the true life of tradition."[126] Wolf Lepenies's essay "Remoteness from Society and Hostility towards Sociology in Stefan George's Circle" helps explain this inversion from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge.[127] Wach's inversion, his conflicted location as an intellectual (to cite

123. As cited in Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science*, 347, emphasis in original.

124. And, according to Wach, one can master silence. "Western man [has a] right to be master within his inner four walls." In Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 115.

125. Walter Benjamin, "Against a Masterpiece," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* vol. 2, *1927–1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 383, emphasis added.

126. Benjamin had split with Freideutsche Jugend over its militancy.

127. Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science*, 258–79.

Lepenies in another context), "resulted from the enforced hypertrophy of the realm of reflection, from imposed loss of the ability to exercise real power, and from the consequent pressure to justify one's situation."[128] From this perspective, Wach's (anti-)sociology abdicated responsibility for a response to the crisis of the European intellectual because it was not equipped to do so; it was itself the sign of disempowerment. Instead of Benjamin's critique that engages such a situation at its roots, Wach chose to represent an imagined past. "The authentic image may be old, but the authentic idea is new," said Walter Benjamin.[129]

Recall our protagonist in Swift Hall, weeping over Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Hyde Park was the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to his Leipzig:

> Prior to an outbreak of cholera there usually appears a kind of fly not otherwise seen; in like manner might not these [previous system-builders] be a sign that a calamity is in store for humankind—for example, the loss of the ethical and the religious? Therefore, be cautious with an abstract thinker who not only wants to remain in abstraction's pure being but wants this to be the highest for a human being, and wants such thinking, which results in the ignoring of the ethical and a misunderstanding of the religious, to be the highest human thinking.[130]

Whether or not he had this particular passage from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* in mind when he wept, it seems apt. Throughout his German career he lived under the "sign that a calamity is in store for humankind," a worry widely expressed at the time. In Swift Hall, did he then weep for the consequent death of Europe? As nostalgia for the *Existenz* of those passionate preexile years? For the diminution of his grandiose *Religionswissenschaft*? Did he cry for a loss or for a gain? Was he weeping for abandoning a vigorously embraced Kierkegaardian existentialism in his German career? Was his American "History of Religions" a "postscript" that exposed the ambitions of his own youthful system-building? On all this, silence.

I see Joachim Wach not in the light of Kierkegaard but, rather, like another prince of Denmark cursed with indecision. Not only by principle but by nature, Wach was committed to the "middle path," a path he explicitly espoused on a

128. Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholy and Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 61. It might be worthwhile to follow through on Lepenie's suggestion, that of "a counterbalance to the imposed order of the unemployed *Frondeur*." *Melancholy and Society*, 137

129. Benjamin, "Against a Masterpiece," 383.

130. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. XII.1, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 307.

number of important occasions.[131] Such a "dialectic," however, might also justifiably be characterized as *ambivalence*. Wach's varieties of ambivalent experience can be sketched as follows. *German but not German*: Joachim Wach was a nationalistic German but was expelled for not being a pure German. *Sociologist but not sociologist*: Wach called himself (among other things) a sociologist of religion but shared the Georgean "hostility to sociology" and was never generally recognized in the larger field of sociology. *Scientific but not scientific*: Wach proposed scientific approaches to religion, but his work obviated generally recognized canons of scientific method. *Georgean but not Georgean*: Wach was a Georgean in his personal and cultural dealings but not Georgean when he operated as a Christian missionary. *Theologian but not theologian*: Wach was a theologian but claimed to separate theology from scientific approaches to religion. *Historian but not historian*: Wach employed the term "historian of religions" but was not a practicing historian and in fact routinely excoriated "historicism." *Philologist but not philologist*: Wach borrowed from and praised the philological labors of working historians of religions, but he himself had no philological practice. *Political but not political*: Wach aligned himself with activists for assertively right-wing political movements, conservative movements of revolution, but he himself did no political activism.[132] Finally and obviously: *not a Jew but yet a Jew, once a Mendelssohn and always a Mendelssohn*, and *gay but not gay*.

I am tempted to call this ambivalence raised to first principle. In the end, I return to my point of departure: fatal, foundational ambivalences resulted in the internal incoherence and ultimate failure of his work. His ambivalences dictated a history of religions whose structural instabilities proved insurmountable to subsequent generations of readers.

His postwar version of the Master-Interpreter" was the "Christian Professor." Like Master-Interpreter, and like "relative objectivity," the Christian Professor's sermon as lecture required a special authority to hold its two terms together. His ineffable authority served as transcendental regulator for both terms. By this means he could claim that *what he is writing is not what he is writing*; for example, as he put it theologically in "The Paradox of the Gospel," the type "Jew" does not refer to "the Jews." Wanting it both ways, having your brother and eating him too, his anti-Judaism was not anti-Jewish.

131. It might be said, perhaps, that, like his teacher Troeltsch, he had a "penchant for compromise"; Harry Liebersohn, *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870–1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 42.

132. Benjamin's assessment of George holds true for Wach's work too. "What is expressed in its formal idiom is the will to evade imminent developments and the presentiments that rise up to confront it. The same may be said of that 'spiritual movement' that aspired to the renewal of human existence without paying heed to politics." Benjamin, "Stefan George in Retrospect," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings*, vol. 2, *1927–1934* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 707.

More broadly, the structural flaw in the *Religionswissenschaft* of Wach's German career was that it was designed to be emancipated but not emancipated. This internal conflict reflected his own double usage. Emancipating *Religionswissenschaft* from other disciplines was the original desideratum set forth in his first methodological foray. He similarly made a spiritual defense of the "outsider's" understanding of foreign religions, that is, an understanding emancipated from controls imposed by the religion under study. He was, so to speak, culturally emancipated, into his fingertips. The emancipation of *Religionswissenschaft* had to be the work of a very modern man. And here's the proverbial rub. A man of supreme ironies, to the end, he seemed unselfconscious of the exquisitely attenuated contradictions wrought by *emancipation but not emancipation*. His unambiguously touted antimodernism did not see that it was *precisely* this modernist's antimodernism that *most* expressed his own ambivalence.

## Existential Understanding

During Wach's German career, hermeneutical revolutions were in the air. Hans Jonas recalled that in those days he "found the hermeneutical task—a kind of demythologizing—almost bewitchingly attractive."[133] The heady possibility not merely of *Verstehen* but indeed of a Master-Interpreter marked Wach's exciting Weimar moment in *Religionswissenschaft*.[134]

Wach was acknowledged for his *Verstehen* by such leading hermeneutical philosophers as Gadamer but was not himself a philosopher. He did not practice the in-the-trenches *work* of understanding—as does, say, a working philosopher or even historian. Here, however, he did have a clear response, and it was existential. Wach always rested on the primacy of the existential; of the blizzard of names and books in Wach's corpus, Kierkegaard stands out, recurring in all genres of his writing, whether youth movement speech, American sermon, or scientific treatise.

Wach, then, was an existentialist theologian first and last. The Master-Interpreter *decides*. Here is where existentialist decisionism comes in. "Neither birthright nor tradition are substitutes for decision. The nature of religious experience demands a personal and an existential commitment," he tellingly

133. Hans Jonas, "Wissenschaft as Personal Experience," *Hastings Center Report* 32, no. 4 (July–August 2002): 31. For more on the analogous moment of Hans Jonas, see my "Jonas in Marburg, 1928," in *Judaism and the Phenomenon of Life: The Legacy of Hans Jonas*, ed. Hava Tirosh Samuelson and Christian Wiese (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), 39–73.

134. Heiler's *Gebet*, Otto's *Heilige*, and Karl Barth's *Römerbrief* all came out within a year of each other.

asserted in a Barrows Lecture of 1952[135]—all the more striking, when, after the war, he began to include existentialism in his litanies of contemporary contemptibles. One of the very last things he wrote was "The Self-Understanding of Modern Man," published in its original German in the year of his death, 1955:

> To be sure, modern man has understandably been made distrustful and skeptical by his disappointments with compulsory or pseudo-groups, especially those of a political nature. He prefers honest isolation to a false, artificial, or forced communalization. So-called Existentialism . . . has expressed this position unambiguously. Only genuine community is worthy of our consideration, but does it still exist?[136] Modern man differs from his immediate predecessors as greatly in his position vis-à-vis the group as he differs from them in his relationship to the past.[137]

*Wach but not Wach*: the locution "modern man" here is a first-personal singular ventriloquizing a third-person singular. The title of this essay, "The Self-Understanding of Modern Man," might thus be read autobiographically. The exile speaks from apparent experience of the "hopelessness characteristic of Existentialism [that] arises from a feeling of complete isolation."[138] Around the same time, he cited, of all things, Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: "It is easier to be a Christian when I am not a Christian than to become a Christian when I am one."[139] Kierkegaardian struggles seem to seethe just underneath the exposition. Interestingly, in his Hyde Park decade, he excluded Kierkegaard from "the existentialists." At this point in his career, Wach sought to dissociate Kierkegaard from certain self-styled "existentialist" contemporaries. "On the secularized and ultraliberal mind of our day, the

135. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 154.

136. This rhetorical question brings to mind the tormenting doubts of Kierkegaard. I am also reminded of William Bronk, *Life Supports: New and Collected Poems* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), 165–66.

> Yes, the myth, yes. Of course, the myth.
> Something to believe as, mornings, a place to go
> And be there daytimes. Or be away
> —even that: a place to be away from.
>
> A place. Myth is a place where there isn't one.
> You know, there are places so beautiful
> we could almost be there, as it were.
> No; I don't believe. But it is true.

137. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 6.

138. Ibid., 3.

139. Ibid., 88.

existentialists have exerted a powerful attraction by stressing anxiety, suffering, and abandonment."[140]

One might say that such private theologizing—contemplative, learned, and capacious—had private, personal virtues to commend it, as such virtues would do for anyone. As Master-Interpreter, however, he also laid claim to universals, to possessing the general case, to enjoying privileged access, rather Platonically, *to the type itself*. The Master-Interpreter of *Religionswissenschaft*, in fact, tended toward the ultimate type, the type of *Religion*. Kurt Rudolph neatly recognized the problem with this tendency: "Every type which the study of history has developed—synchronic types, developmental types, ideal types, real types, Gestalt types, and so on—has been developed from comparison except one, the unreflective 'cryptotype,' as it were, to which our term 'religion' and a great many others belong."[141] One might be justified in concluding that the "Master-Interpreter" is the central cryptotype for a correlating center that cannot hold.

## Conclusion: Understanding but Not Understanding

A man of sensitivities, a man of a reflective disposition, Joachim Wach thought hard, with sobriety, earnestness, and true grit, on the interesting and important problems involved in the *encounter with another*, as existentialists thought of it; or, in the idiom favored by the autonomous discipline of religious studies, *understanding a religion not your own*. He wanted to be accepted as a philosopher *and* as a social scientist, as a great teacher *and* as a servant of Jesus Christ. While he did not succeed in this ambition, he will always be remembered as a founding father of the history of religions.

And he should be remembered as more than just a historical placeholder, as that dimly remembered predecessor who enabled the vivid Eliadean revolution. Even though I consider his typologies hopelessly outmoded, it is his *typological imagination*, in particular, that strikes me as his greatest strength and his most admirable contribution to our work. Wach sought with consistency and insight to create workable typologies of religion, and it is that consistent seeking, and not the workability of its results, to which we should continue to direct the attention of our students. He achieved a kind of *typological sublime*. Along with this rage for order, this drive toward understanding the types of religion, his ideal of tolerance cannot be gainsaid, and likewise deserves its due. Despite

140. Ibid., 89.
141. Rudolph, *Historical Fundamentals on the Study of Religions*, 55.

being embedded in mission, his call for tolerance and understanding resonates as much now as ever. Kurt Rudolph's assessment stands on its own: "Wach stood nevertheless in the long run for the liberal-theological tradition (as a pupil E. Troeltsch), whose influence on *Religionswissenschaft* we became acquainted with."[142]

The twin gestures of Joachim Wach's *verstehende Religionswissenschaft*, then, were typing and tolerating. These gestures epitomize the strengths and weaknesses of the "liberal-theological tradition." As expressions of his vaunted "relative objectivity," he sought "scientific" dominance over his materials while also tolerating them. In so doing, he brought to these practices a certain supremacism, an ever-present suggestion of mastery, that seemed always to imply that it was the superior typing and tolerating the inferior. In a word, *tolerance but not tolerance*.

But you cannot have your domination and your tolerance too. The Master-Interpreter, Wach's epochal contribution to the history of the history of religions, was constructed uncomfortably on an opposition whose antitheses were fused forcibly but temporarily. One dominates, and we call him Master. One tolerates, and we call him Interpreter. Wach, finally, did not take account of the imperialism inherent in typological understanding. To understand is also to expropriate; you take over what is not originally yours and, by transforming it into your manageable "types," you colonize it.

Wach and Eliade embodied the persona of Master—Wach was called a guru even by the sober Kitagawa, and Eliade was known to some in Chicago as the Maestro. He who lives by mastery dies by mastery. Wach's typologies never surmounted their own magisterial cryptotypicality. Rudolph stressed the point that "Otto, van der Leeuw, Heiler, Mensching, Wach . . . all essentially sacrificed the historical, scientific character of the history of religions to theology. Future historians of religions must recognize this danger and seek to overcome it."[143] He who stands against history, history slays. This is not the place or time to defend, as did Rudolph two decades ago in these very halls, the work of history. I will just say that, since that *Wende* in the mid-1980s, it has been time to put history back in history of religions. In the end, Wach's sacrifice of history to theology bequeathed to subsequent generations, alas, understanding but not understanding.

142. "Letzlich stand Wach doch noch in der liberal-theologischen Tradition (als Schüler E. Troeltschs), deren Einfluß auf die Religionswissenschaft wir kennengelernt haben." Rudolph, *Die Religionsgeschichte an der Leipziger Universität*, 147.

143. Rudolph, *Historical Fundamentals on the Study of Religions*, 38.

# 3

# After the Naming Explosion: Joachim Wach's Unfinished Project

*Gregory D. Alles*

Anyone who has read Joachim Wach's later work, perhaps *The Sociology of Religion* or *The Comparative Study of Religion*, is likely to wonder about the various categories that Wach identifies. This phase of his work is unrelentingly classificatory; but where did all of these categories come from? Joseph Kitagawa once told me a story to answer that question.

Wach, he said, chose his categories in the following manner. When he was working on, let us say, the best way to divide up the field of religious leadership, he would write down on separate slips of paper—perhaps the size of three-by-five cards, perhaps smaller—as many names for religious leaders as he could think of.[1] Then he would spread them out on a desk before him and begin to shuffle. Although Wach might not have used this language, his goal was to identify basic, midlevel positions in a categorical hierarchy—in this case, a categorical hierarchy of religious leaders. He aimed to reduce the initial multiplicity of names to a series of terms characterized by economy (containing relatively few members), comprehensiveness (encompassing all the names Wach could think of), and parsimony (each bottom-level name—each slip of paper—belonging to one and only one midlevel category). To reach this goal, Wach would organize the slips into piles based

1. I suspect that this was not a closed procedure; that is, I suspect that Wach would write out more slips later in the process as other names came to him.

on perceived similarities: provisionally, *x, y*, and *z* would be put into a pile called by one of the words on the slips, let us say "prophets"; similarly, *a* and *b* would be put into a pile labeled "priests"; and so on. Initially, Wach would adjust and readjust the midlevel categories, shifting items back and forth between rubrics. Eventually, he would arrive at what we might consider a Pareto optimum:[2] no slip could be shifted to another pile without the total value of the categorization being diminished, at least as measured by Wach's intuition.[3] At this point, Wach was done, unless, of course, he thought of more terms and needed to repeat the exercise. One might apply a number of names to the resulting midlevel categories, but Wach referred to them as "types." These were—and I remember that Kitagawa stressed this point—not ideal types but concrete types, types of actually existing religious phenomena.[4]

I admit that as an account of Wach's working procedure, this story must remain somewhat dubious. I have only one witness for it, Kitagawa, and with a little effort we might impugn that witness's motives and reliability—or mine. Besides, the least reliable testimony in a court of law is the testimony of an eyewitness. Bad as that may be, it only gets worse. Not only is my repeating of the story equivalent to hearsay, but I am also repeating it more than twenty years after I heard it. I know that I am using terms in this version, such as Pareto optimum, of which I was completely unaware while Kitagawa was still alive. Furthermore, at the time I heard the story, I thought it described one of the most bizarre academic procedures of which I had ever heard.[5] That judgment, too, may have distorted my memory and my current version of the narrative.

Nevertheless, I like the story. For one thing, it shifts attention away from what scholars say they do to what they actually do: from methodological theory to an ethnography of scholarship. For another, it raises important issues about Wach's work and ours as well. For although I surmise that few of us have ever sorted little pieces of paper, I am not convinced that we do much better when we choose the categories in which we talk about what, for the sake of convenience, I will call religious phenomena.

2. According to the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), the optimal distribution of a society's resources is reached when no redistribution of resources can make someone better off without making others (by their judgment) worse off.

3. I confess that I have not done a systematic survey of Wach's typology, but it is perhaps interesting that Wach's typology of religious leaders conforms to the so-called rule of 7 ± 2: that the mind retains in memory optimally seven items with a deviation of two on either side. Wach identifies nine types of religious leaders.

4. Writing in the first edition of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Kitagawa notes the influence on Wach of Max Scheler's "concrete phenomenology of religious objects and acts" ("Wach, Joachim," vol. 15, 312).

5. But compare the shuffling of index cards in pursuit of the essential structure of myths in Claude Lévi-Strauss's well-known essay "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1967), 202–28.

We might be tempted to attribute Wach's procedure to a judgment that Eric Ziolkowski claims comes from Kitagawa: after the rise of Nazism and the move to the United States, Wach lost his intellectual creativity.[6] But typology is hardly characteristic only of Wach's American period. It figured prominently in both his writing and teaching in Germany as well.[7] In what follows, I first establish the biographical context for Wach's adoption of this odd procedure. Then I turn to some constructive comments. My aim is to address the reasons, as I see them, that Wach's project remained unfinished, and what it might mean for us to take a step or two in the direction of completion, inhabiting as we do a very different intellectual universe.

## Toward a Context

One does not have to read the literature about Wach long before one encounters his biological ancestry. Scholars have been fond of noting that he was descended, through both his mother and his father, from the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and, through his father, from the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. (His mother was descended from Felix Mendelssohn's brother.) One also frequently reads about Wach's paternal grandfather, Adolf Wach, a renowned professor of law who taught at the University of Leipzig for almost fifty years.[8] It is less well known but equally telling that still today the Wach family maintains a center for the musical arts in Switzerland, founded by Joachim's grandfather Adolf and currently (spring 2007) run by his nephew Thomas.

To an egalitarian American such observations can give the impression of snobbishness. What difference does it make for our assessment of Wach's thought to whom he was related? There are, however, reasons not to discount Wach's ancestry. In 1924 he became a Privatdozent at Leipzig, as his renowned

6. Eric J. Ziolkowski, "Wach, Religion, and 'The Emancipation of Art,'" *Numen* 46 (1999): 345–69, esp. 348.

7. Limiting attention only to titles in which the word "type" appears, we may note the lecture course "Haupttypen außerchristlicher Frömmigkeit" [Main Types of Non-Christian Piety], which Wach held in winter semester 1930–31 (Rainer Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978], 21), as well as the following publications: Wach, *Die Typenlehre Trendelenburgs und ihr Einfluß auf Dilthey: Eine philosophie- und geistesgechichtliche Studie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1926); Wach, "Typenlehre," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Hermann Gunkel et al., 5 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1927–31), vol. 5, cols. 1331–32; Wach, *Typen religiöser Anthropologie: Ein Vergleich der Lehre vom Menschen im religionsphilosophischen Denken von Orient und Okzident* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1932); and Wach, "Typen der Anthropologie," in *Die Wissenschaft am Scheidewege von Leben und Geist. Festschrift Ludwig Klages zum 60. Geburtstag, 10. Dezember 1932*, ed. Hans Prinzhorn (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1932).

8. Adolf Wach taught in Leipzig from 1876 until his retirement in 1920; http://www.koeblergerhard.de/juristen/tot/totw.html. He died April 4, 1926.

grandfather was coming to the end of his career. He received his first paid position in 1927, the year after his grandfather died. In 1935 the government of Saxony removed him from his teaching position because he was not a "pure Aryan." (Other family members received worse. After Wach's father, Felix, died, his mother, Katharina, and sister Susanne were incarcerated in the concentration camp at Theresienstatt. They escaped to Switzerland with the help of forged papers and highly placed friends in Sweden and Switzerland.)[9] One can even make a case that Wach's family background had its effect on his conception of the study of religions. For example, Eric Ziolkowski cites it in exploring the relation between Wach's *Religionswissenschaft* and aesthetics.[10]

Scholars have differed on Wach's intellectual ancestry. In his dissertation, Richard Scheimann traced the structures of Wach's thought to Wilhelm Dilthey. Kitagawa often named an earlier influence, the philologist August Boeckh. Rainer Flasche sees Ernst Troeltsch and Georg Simmel, along with Dilthey, as the most important influences on Wach. Focusing on aesthetics, Eric Ziolkowski emphasizes Wach's connection with the circle around Stefan George, a connection that he sees as mediated above all by Friedrich Gundolf during Wach's years in Heidelberg (1922–24).[11]

I do not want to examine these claims to intellectual ancestry in detail. All of them provide a ground from which Wach's hermeneutical orientation could grow, and it would probably be misguided to discount them altogether. Here I simply want to note that, like other elements of Wach's thought, such as the division of *Religionswissenschaft* into historical and systematic components and the conception of religion as an expression of an inner experience, the emphasis on typology—and on types not as rational constructs but as derived from experience—is consonant with Dilthey's philosophy of life. As Wach knew, Dilthey himself identified types of worldview. Writing about Dilthey's relationship to F. A. Trendelenburg in 1926, Wach observed that "the goal of a theory of worldview . . . [was] to arrange [various worldviews] into groups on the basis of similarities and analogies, which would lead to an essential [*wesentlich*] reduction in the large number of systems and lead eventually to a summary of them in the form of types."[12] In "Typenlehre," his article on typology in the

9. Thomas Wach, "Das Ried seit 1881: Hintergrund und Geschichte des Fördervereins Ried (Wilderswil) in memoriam Lili Wach Mendelssohn," 6; http://www.mendelssohn-ried.ch/bilder/geschichte.pdf.

10. Ziolkowski, "Wach, Religion, and 'The Emancipation of Art,'" 345–46, 348–49,

11. See, in addition to the works by Flasche and Ziolkowski already cited, Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Gibt es ein Verstehen fremder Religionen?* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), and Richard W. Scheimann, "Wach's Theory of the Science of Religion" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, Divinity School, 1963). On Wach and George (as mediated by G. van der Leeuw), see the essay by Hans Kippenberg in this volume.

12. Rainer Flasche, *Die Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), 28, summarizing Wach, *Die Typenlehre Trendelenburgs*, 7.

second edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Wach attributed the revival of typological analysis to Dilthey.[13]

One name is noticeably missing from these genealogies: that of Max Weber. This is particularly surprising, because it is apparent from Wach's writings that he owed Weber a great deal intellectually. For example, Wach's categories of religious leadership are inconceivable apart from Weber's work. Despite this debt, however, Wach strongly criticized Weber on methodological grounds. In an essay published in 1931, he condemned Weber for (among other things) not perceiving the object of the sociology of religion in its purity, for arbitrariness in his choice of terms, and for a failure to consider the internal essence, the originating religious experience, in discussing religious phenomena.[14]

These criticisms are telling, and telling in a biographical sense. They reflect, in a manner that Weber might have called an "elective affinity," the views of the German *Bildungsbürgertum*, the educated, professional, nonaristocratic privileged class to which Wach so clearly and unproblematically belonged. This class had traditionally tended to distinguish itself from its main nonaristocratic competitor, business leaders (the *Besitzbürgertum*), by emphasizing the cultivation of the personality (*Bildung*), conceived as the internal nurture of the spirit or mind (*Geist*) through and for what we might call the arts and humanities, in distinction from technological and material pursuits.[15]

The *Bildungsbürgertum* had at one time been the leading nonaristocratic class in Germany, but by the late nineteenth century it was declining in prominence as a recently united, rapidly industrializing, and militarily strengthening Germany seemed ready to take on the world. Simultaneously, the division between the professional elite and business leaders was eroding, as members of the two groups began to intermarry at a greater rate and sons of business leaders entered the university.[16] Until World War I, the *Bildungsbürgertum* continued to be extremely active politically. That applied not just to the German legal establishment but to professors of all stripes, including professors of theology like Ernst Troeltsch, Martin Rade, and a young Rudolf

13. Wach, "Typenlehre," col. 1332.

14. Joachim Wach, *Einführung in die Religionssoziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1931), 74–75, cited in Flasche, *Religionswissenschaft Joachim Wachs*, 44.

15. These are, of course, standard features of German Romanticism. See the classic study by Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

16. For a good discussion of these transformations, see the appropriate sections in David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Otto.[17] But Wach's formative years were turbulent ones. They included Germany's defeat in World War I, the establishment of the Weimar Republic, and the financial crises of both the middle and the late 1920s. In this context Rudolf Otto, who had once complained that there was no one in Breslau with whom he could talk politics, abandoned politics for the extrapolitical activities of his Religiöser Menschheitsbund.[18] Wach, almost thirty years Otto's junior, seems never to have shared Otto's political inclinations. Noting in his *Habilitationsschrift* that earlier political interests had done harm to the study of religions,[19] he opted for the seclusion of a sui generis domain: a politically disengaged emphasis on the traditional concerns of *Bildung*, perhaps in the interests of cultural renewal. Among other things, these concerns led him to emphasize the superiority of the internal and to root religion in a supremely important experience, the experience of ultimate reality.

Such considerations define a context for Wach's methodological criticism of Weber and more broadly for his interest in hermeneutics, rooted in understanding others through a sympathetic recovery of their experiences rather than a study of their goals, expectations, or aspirations. But they do not yet define a context for Wach's interest in typology. For although Wach may have credited Dilthey with the revival of typology, Wach's project within the study of religions also clearly fit into broader concerns with classification, concerns that often went by the imprecise name "phenomenology."[20] These concerns reflect the aftermath of what I will here call, with apologies to developmental psychologists, the naming explosion.[21]

17. Ernst Troeltsch is well enough known not to require references. On Rade, see Christoph Schwöbel, *Martin Rade: Das Verhältnis von Geschichte, Religion und Moral als Grundproblem seiner Theologie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1980); Anne Christine Nagel, *Martin Rade: Theologe und Politiker des sozialen Liberalismus: Eine politische Biographie* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1996); and Vereinigung der Freunde der Christlichen Welt, *An die Freunde: Vertrauliche d.i. nicht für die Öffentlichkeit bestimmte Mitteilungen (1903–1934)*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (1903–1934; reprint, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993). I have discussed Otto's early career to some extent in "Rudolf Otto, Cultural Colonialism, and the 'Discovery' of the Holy," in *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations*, ed. Timothy Fitzgerald (London: Equinox Press, 2007), 179–94.

18. Gregory D. Alles, "Rudolf Otto and the Politics of Utopia," *Religion* 21 (1991): 235–56; Frank Obergethmann, "Rudolf Ottos 'Religiöser Menschheitsbund'—ein Kapitel interreligiöser Begegnung zwischen den Weltkriegen," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 6 (1998): 79–106.

19. Joachim Wach, *Religionswissenschaft: Prolegomena zu ihrer wissenschaftstheoretischen Grundlegung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924), 13.

20. See, e.g., Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), and more recently, James L. Cox, *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates* (London: T & T International, 2006).

21. Ruth Garrett Millikan, *On Clear and Confused Ideas: An Essay about Substance Concepts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 69, citing Ellen M. Markman, "The Whole-Object, Taxonomic, and Mutual Exclusivity Assumptions as Initial Constraints on Word Meanings," in *Perspectives on Language and Thought: Interrelations in Development*, ed. Susan A. Gelman and James P. Byrnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 72–106, esp. 81. Cf. Ruth Garrett Millikan, *Language: A Biological Model* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 119, citing Noam Chomsky, "Language and Nature," *Mind* 104 (1995): 1–61, esp. 15.

The naming explosion I have in mind is not the explosion that takes place around eighteen to twenty-four months of age, when children learn on average a word an hour, most of them nouns. It is one that took place among European adults over a much longer time span. It began at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century with the discovery of the Americas and, simultaneously, increased contact with Asia as a result of an increased volume of oceangoing trade.[22] The impact of these events on knowledge was immense. For example, in the realm of biology, according to some estimates, the number of different animal species that Europeans had to manage conceptually increased by a power of ten.[23] The increase in knowledge of human beings was immense, too.

One way to manage conceptual explosions is through categorization. For example, Edward Smith and Douglas Medin observe: "Without concepts, mental life would be chaotic. . . . If each individual entity needed a distinct name, our language would be staggeringly complex and communication virtually impossible."[24] Similarly, Ellen Markman writes: "Categorization . . . is a means of simplifying the environment, of reducing the load on memory, and of helping us to store and retrieve information efficiently."[25] One can see an impetus to categorization in the realm of geography quite clearly in, for example, four paintings by Jan van Kessel from about 1666, now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. The paintings are entitled Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. Each has a central panel that represents the natural history of what was, apparently to Kessel's mind, the most significant—important and typical—site in the region, for Asia, Jerusalem. Each central panel is surrounded by sixteen smaller ones that represent other places in the same region—for Asia, Osaka, Calcutta, Goa, and so on. These panels contain what look today like motley combinations of the factual and the legendary, perhaps with more of the latter than the former, but the end result is a geometrically ordered representation of the entire world.

As is well known, the impetus to categorization in religious studies reached something of a turning point in the late nineteenth century. It was

22. Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau, *Merchants, Companies, and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

23. On biology, see Scott Atran, *Cognitive Foundations of Natural History: Towards an Anthropology of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

24. Edward Smith and Douglas Medin, *Categories and Concepts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1, quoted in Ruth Garrett Millikan, "A Common Structure for Concepts of Individuals, Stuffs, and Real Kinds: More Mama, More Milk, More Mouse," in *Concepts: Core Readings*, ed. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 525–47, esp. 537.

25. Ellen M. Markman, *Categorization and Naming in Children: Problems of Induction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 11, cited in Millikan, "Common Structure," 537.

then that phenomenologists such as C. P. Tiele and Chantepie de la Saussaye began to divide religious phenomena into carefully ordered synchronic groups. They did so in a context in which several factors combined to increase the number of religious phenomena of which Europeans were aware. Among them were the time-space compression, resulting from increasingly rapid technologies of communication and technology, identified by David Harvey;[26] the colonial adventure, which reached its height with Germany's entry into the scramble for colonies in 1884 and which meant that Europeans, perhaps more than anyone anywhere else in the world, had reason to be interested in what happened everywhere; and developments in the historical sciences that provided unprecedented access to documents and inscriptions from the ancient world. In such a context phenomenology or, in Wach's case, typology appears as a technique of management, not of political administration but of conceptual management in an increasingly complex religious environment.

Some of Wach's most important predecessors remained unaffected by this naming explosion. Dilthey may have identified types of worldviews, but his horizons were extremely narrow. His three fundamental types were naturalism, the idealism of freedom, and objective idealism—Hobbes, Kant, and Hegel, respectively.[27] What would have happened, one wonders, if he had somehow been compelled to take even just South Asian systems of thought equally seriously? Otto, who studied and taught at Göttingen contemporaneously with Dilthey, but whose precise relation to Dilthey is uncertain, centered his attention not on religious forms but on a rather curious inversion of the Kantian project: he studied the experience that, he thought, made religion and religious categorization possible. Although he clearly appreciated typologies, he did very little with them. At most he identified two types of religious experience, the mystical and the devotional.[28] One feature that distinguishes Wach from both Dilthey and Otto, then, is that while he retained their commitment to *Bildung* rooted in internal experience, he also wedded it to a broadened typology of the world's religious phenomena that arose in the aftermath of the naming explosion. The combination proved unstable.

26. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989).

27. Wilhelm Dilthey, "Die Typen der Weltanschauung und ihre Ausbildung in den metaphysischen Systemen," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Bernhard Groethuysen, vol. 8, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Tuebner, 1960), 73–118, esp. 94–118.

28. See, e.g., Rudolf Otto, "Mystische und gläubige Frömmigkeit," in *Sünde und Urschuld* (Munich: Beck, 1932), 140–77.

## The Trouble with Wach's Types

Wach's typology seems to receive little respect these days. One author (whose name I am unfortunately unable to recall) has written that he or she finds more insight in the analyses of the "religiously unmusical" Max Weber than in the typologies of the allegedly more religiously musical Wach. I tend to agree. So my purpose here is not to claim that Wach deserves more respect than he gets. It is to ask why Wach's typologies deserve no more respect than they get. I raise that question because some of what I take to be the common reasons for rejecting Wach are wrong.

Take Wach's notion of the classical, for example.[29] By any standards the word is unfortunate today. It invites rejection for the same reason that an emphasis on Wach's illustrious ancestry may make us uncomfortable. It smacks of the privilege of the elite, a privilege that seems to be undeserved because it reflects nothing more than the arbitrary preferences of people who have—or had—money and power. Why else should one religious leader count as a classical instance of, say, the prophet and another not?

Nevertheless, Wach's approach is not entirely untenable. It is possible to see Wach's notion of the classical as adumbrating the prototype effects detected by Eleanor Rosch and her colleagues, in some versions of which a robin, for example, is more prototypically a bird than an ostrich is.[30] In Wach's language, we might say that a robin is a "classical" bird. To be sure, replacing Wach's "classical" with "prototypical" would not completely pull him out of the swamp. For one thing, Rosch and company determine prototypicality empirically by surveying large numbers of people who are considered to know a concept, querying them in all sorts of controlled ways. To all appearances Wach's classical, like his paper shuffling in my opening story, reflects at most only his own individual answers to such queries, evoked in uncontrolled circumstances, nothing more. For another thing, a large number of theorists associate prototype effects with the heuristic mechanism that the mind uses to make quick judgments in categorization, judgments that on further reflection may require correction.[31] For example, to the untutored eye, bats resemble prototypical birds more than they resemble mammals. Similarly, dolphins resemble

29. Joachim Wach, "The Concept of the 'Classical' in the Study of Religion," in *Types of Religious Experience, Christian and Non-Christian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 48–57.

30. E.g., Eleanor Rosch, "Principles of Categorization," in *Concepts: Core Readings*, 189–206.

31. E.g., Sharon Lee Armstrong, Lila R. Gleitman, and Henry Gleitman, "What Some Concepts Might Not Be," in *Concepts: Core Readings*, 225–59, esp. 247–48; Daniel N. Osherson and Edward E. Smith, "On the Adequacy of Prototype Theory as a Theory of Concepts," in *Concepts: Core Readings*, 261–78, esp. 277–78.

prototypical fish. Nevertheless, zoologists have determined that it is better to classify both bats and dolphins as mammals. It is not, then, entirely clear what role, if any, prototypes should play in the formulation of considered, academic categories. Prototype effects may be tendencies for which we academics need to correct, as when we correct the initial impression that bats belong with birds and dolphins belong with fish, rather than strategies that we should embrace. Perhaps most consequentially, Wach's notion of the classical seems to resemble most closely a widely criticized version of prototype theory, the exemplar version. In this version, a prototype is a specific instance or token of the type, the way a robin is taken as a prototypical bird and, perhaps, my greyhound as a prototypical greyhound, in comparison with a two-legged greyhound or one that stands twenty feet tall. His notion would thus also fall victim to the criticism of George Lakoff, for example, for whom prototypes are better thought of not as exemplars—as specific instances or tokens—but as cognitive models. As Lakoff writes, "scalar goodness-of-example judgments for categories"—such as those elicited by Rosch: a robin is a better example of a bird than an ostrich is, a dog is a better example of a mammal than a whale is—"are superficial. They show nothing *direct* about the nature of categorization. . . . Prototype effects result from the fact that knowledge is organized in terms of what I will call *cognitive models*. There are various kinds of cognitive models and hence prototype effects come from a variety of sources."[32] I am still not convinced that it is impossible to pull Wach from this swamp. For example, he himself at times acknowledged that types need to be defined in terms of their structures, not simply in terms of superficial resemblances. But here we may find ourselves in a place where the best we can do is to think with Wach against Wach, to adapt a phrase from Pierre Bourdieu.[33]

Another common criticism of Wach's typologies is that they are ethnocentric. This criticism does not carry as much punch as many people think. It is not that the observation is false. Wach's typologies are certainly ethnocentric. A simple read through his types of religious leaders demonstrates that beyond any reasonable doubt: the founder, the reformer, the prophet, the seer, the magician, the soothsayer, the holy man (or woman), the priest, and the religious (in the Catholic sense of someone with a special religious vocation, like a monk or a nun). If that list is not ethnocentric, I do not know what is. But we are perfectly content to use ethnocentric terms all the time. Terms in

32. George Lakoff, "Cognitive Models and Prototype Theory," in *Concepts: Core Readings*, 391–421, esp. 391–92. Those interested in pursuing this argument further should consult Lakoff's text.

33. I know this phrase from the German translation, "Mit Weber gegen Weber. Pierre Bourdieu in Gespräch," in *Das religiöse Feld. Texte zur Ökonomie des Heilsgeschehens*, Edition discours, 11 (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 2000), 111–29.

physics like force, mass, gravity, energy, heat, and photon; terms in chemistry like element, molecule, atom, oxidation, reduction, oxygen, and hydrogen; terms in biology like cell, nucleus, chromosome, mitosis, meiosis, genus, and species—all these words are ethnocentric in the sense that they did not arise with Adam, or whoever the first speaking humans were, and were then transmitted to every human language. They were invented at particular times and places. For example, "oxygen" and "hydrogen" were coined by the French chemist Lavoisier in the course of arguments with British chemists, who had a very different "chemistry culture." But we still use them, and people around the world have adopted them or their equivalents. That is, we do not determine the utility of words on the basis of their origin but on the basis of what they allow us to do. If this were not the case, all analysis would be impossible because we would have to reject every term, including every term we used in the process of rejection.

This observation requires special handling. It would be wrong to deduce, on the basis of the ethnocentric character of categories in the natural sciences, that we are perfectly entitled to adopt Wach's types if we wish to do so, despite their being ethnocentric. Rather, it should occasion reflection on why we grant the charge of ethnocentrism more weight in the case of Wach's types than in the case of basic categories in physics, chemistry, and biology. That we do so is a symptom; it indicates that something is wrong. Actually, it indicates that at least two things are wrong: first, Wach does not use his types to do anything, and second, his types have no relation to his model of what produces religion. The combined operation of these two problems makes the charge of ethnocentrism credible. For in the wake of those two failings, Wach has no good reason to choose the types that he does. The only reasons for him to shuffle the pieces of paper into his piles are his own peculiar preferences, shaped by his own limited experiences with human religiosity and, one suspects, by his own religious convictions as well.

The first problem with Wach's types is that they are unmotivated. They appear to result from a desire to simplify the number of categories available, nothing more. But that is not sufficient. Gregory Murphy and Douglas Medin have argued that some of our impressions of categories used by so-called experts—people with specialized knowledge not shared by the whole community—are misleading.[34] For example, they argue that it is wrong to suggest that expert categories are clearer than naive categories. Most categories, philosophers now seem to agree, defy definition and have fuzzy boundaries. That is just as true of categories that experts use as of naive ones. They also argue that

34. Gregory Murphy and Douglas Medin, "The Role of Theories in Conceptual Coherence," in *Concepts: Core Readings*, 425–58.

it is wrong to suggest that experts' categories are more subtle or nuanced than naive categories. In some cases experts simplify where ordinary people make incredibly subtle distinctions. Rather, what distinguishes experts' categories from naive ones is that experts use their categories to *do* something intellectually. For example, we accept the ethnocentric categories of physics because they allow us, or someone to whom we are inclined to defer, to build bridges and explain why objects fall at the speed that they do.

In this respect, Wach's typologies are "naive": he does not use his categories to do anything. For Wach, the formulation of the typologies was an end in itself. What difference does it make whether with Wach we distinguish between natural and specifically religious communities? What difference does it make on Wach's analysis if we call someone a founder or a reformer or a holy man or woman or a *homo religiosus* (in Wach's, not Eliade's, sense) or simply make up a word and let it come to mean what it comes to mean? None that I can see. Wach's "expertise," presuming that he was an expert of some sort, does not involve his wanting to do anything intellectual. It is simply that he is familiar with a greater range of religious data than the ordinary German or North American. He has personally encountered the naming explosion, and he tries to simplify the multiplicity of nouns that results by shuffling slips of paper (or the equivalent of doing so).

The contrast with Weber is instructive. Weber's terms are every bit as ethnocentric as Wach's. In fact, in the case of religious authority and leadership, many of Weber's terms are identical with Wach's. But in Weber's works these terms are not simply classificatory. They assume a role in what he calls ideal types, analytical constructs formed by artificially accentuating certain features and ignoring others. Weber emphasizes that these constructs do not represent concrete reality; they may never be found as such in any empirical instance. Rather, ideal types help us understand empirical reality by demonstrating what would happen if only certain factors were in operation. Today we might say that they provide us with something like a mental model or idealized mechanism with which to compare what we observe. Weber may have developed a *verstehende Soziologie* in the sense that he took the meanings and intentions of human agents seriously, but he took them seriously in order to construct explanatory models. For him, classification was not an end in itself. To the extent that it was not, it makes Weber's work more engaging than Wach's.

There is a second, equally large problem with Wach's typologies. He insists, in part against Weber, that scholars of religions must take the core, origin, or essence of religion seriously. That core is religious experience, characterized as the integral experience of ultimate reality, potentially more powerful than any other experience. This is simply Wach's version of the traditional convictions of

the German *Bildungsbürgertum*. He conjoins it to the typologies that he develops in response to the naming explosion by means of a simple device. He asserts that whoever has religious experience is driven to express it.[35]

Assume for the sake of argument that we could adequately conceptualize ultimate reality. (I do not think this is possible.) Wach's account still would not do. If religious experience as characterized by Wach were in fact the core or origin or essence of religion, then Wach should be able to explain the structures of his typologies by reference to the characteristics of that experience. Yet, his analysis of religious experience is not up to the task. Rudolf Otto's rudimentary contrast between mystical and devotional piety may not be very informative, but at least it is rooted in two very different encounters with the numinous. That may be about the best one can do typologically with as vague an analysis of religious experience as Otto or Wach provided. How is one supposed to derive the founder, the reformer, the prophet, the seer, the magician, the soothsayer, the holy man or woman, the priest, and *homines religiosi* as distinct types from the structures of an integral, all-powerful experience of ultimate reality? We cannot. To introduce another analogy: Wach proceeds like a chemist who develops a theory of the internal structure of matter. The problem is that the theory is utterly useless in accounting for observed chemical properties and reactions. It bears no relation to the tabulation of these properties and reactions in the form of the periodic table. Such a chemical theory would be rather weak. Indeed, it would be useless.

The lack of relation between what Wach postulates as the source of religion and the various forms that he identifies within religion makes it impossible for him to give a tenable response to the naming explosion. To be convincing, a universal typology of religious authority, for example, needs to grow from the structures of the postulated cause of religious authority, just as the periodic table of elements needs somehow to be related to the structures of the atom, the number of protons in the nucleus, and the disposition of electron orbitals. Without that, Wach's typology is ethnocentric. It is nothing more than a list of his favorite categories, with which we may or may not agree. We, too, may shuffle the slips of paper lying on Wach's desk and get an entirely different order that strikes us intuitively as a Pareto optimum. There would be no nonarbitrary way to determine which typology is preferable. Let me put this another way. To the extent that Wach's typology aimed to resolve difficulties created by the naming explosion, his basic assumptions about the originary core of religion—the grounds on which he criticized Max Weber—condemned him to fail.

35. See, e.g., Wach, "Universals in Religion," in *Types of Religious Experience*, 30–47, esp. 33.

## A Step or Two toward Completion

In the time since Wach, the failure both of Wach's project and of the broader response to the naming explosion of which it was an instance has become apparent. The most basic categories in religious studies have come under attack, including the category of religion itself, and despite the acknowledged utility of categorization as a means of simplifying our conceptual apparatus, the most prudent course of action has in many cases seemed to be to retreat into local categories, regardless of the multiplicity of names that results. One cannot overlook the relation of this move to the general crisis of representation in anthropology as well as deconstructive criticism. And yet, the retreat into local categories seems unsatisfactory. Having recognized a similar failure in Wach's project, are we in a better position to move toward, or at least to envision, its completion? To answer that question, I want to reflect a little, now apart from Wach, on the concepts that we use, starting with the highest-order concept in religious studies, religion itself.

Compared with some concepts, "religion" is particularly inference-poor.[36] What I mean is this: in regard to what we can infer from it, "religion" contrasts sharply with some other concepts, such as "human being." To see this, consider as an example a hitherto unknown region of the globe that I will call Ajnatasthan, from the Hindi words for unknown, *ajñāta*, and place, *sthān*.

Begin with the statement that human beings live in Ajnatasthan. I will call them Ajnatasthanis. From the identification that Ajnatasthanis are human beings, we can infer a great deal. We can infer that, physically, an Ajnatasthani normally has two arms with hands, two legs with feet, a torso, a head, two eyes, a nose, a mouth, teeth, a tongue, and so on, as well as an internal structure that includes such vital organs as a pair of lungs, a heart, a stomach, intestines, a

36. Note that inference-poorness is not in and of itself a defect. I will suggest later that for certain purposes some concepts are less useful than others precisely because they are too inference-rich. At the conference from which this volume grew, some concern was expressed about labeling religion inference-poor. I must confess that I cannot understand why. The only reason I can see is the mistaken extension of the implications of poverty from an economic realm—and even there it has sometimes been seen as a virtue—to conceptual analysis, as if scholars of religion were engaged in a kind of country-club competition that impelled them to claim that their concepts were just as rich as someone else's. A friendly comment, received later, suggested that it might be possible to sidestep this resistance by shifting from the terms "inference-rich" and "inference-poor" to the terms "inference-strong" and "inference-weak." That terminology would, however, be not only less precise but also misleading. The characteristic to which I am pointing is quantitative rather than qualitative. It concerns the number of inferences that can be drawn from a concept, a characteristic that "rich-poor" captures but "weak-strong" does not. Although I do not use the terminology "weak-strong" in this essay, I would reserve it for describing the strength of inferences, taken either individually or collectively. Doing so is in keeping with the customary philosophical use of "weak" and "strong," as in weak and strong arguments. For example, the inferences that one can

pair of kidneys, blood, a skeleton, and a bicameral brain, all structured in certain ways that distinguish them from similar features in different sorts of animals. We can also infer that Ajnatasthanis breathe, drink, eat, reproduce sexually rather than asexually, are born, occasionally get sick, and die; that Ajnatasthanis have emotions; that they are, to some extent at least, social creatures; that they have desires upon which they act; and that they communicate through language. For the sake of simplicity, let us assume that there is only one language in Ajnatasthan, and let us call it, too, Ajnatasthani. Although we know none of its particulars, we can nevertheless infer that the language has certain structural features (nominals, verbs, modifiers, and so on); that with sufficient time and effort we would be able to learn, understand, and translate Ajnatasthani, at least if we started at a young enough age; and that as a result we ourselves can communicate with Ajnatasthanis. We also know that Ajnatasthanis have certain patterns of thinking that all human beings seem to share, and that among these patterns are not only a recognition of certain kinds of reasoning as valid but also propensities to make certain mistakes in thinking that we usually identify as logical errors or fallacies. This is just a starting list. In other words, without ever meeting Ajnatasthanis, we know a great deal about them.

There are, of course, some things that we cannot infer from the statement that Ajnatasthanis are human beings. These things include variable physical features that were once of great interest to typologists known as racial theorists, for example, hair color and texture, eye color, skin color, facial and skull shape, and body type. Furthermore, what we do know about Ajnatasthanis is not necessary but only probable knowledge. It is always subject to empirical correction. For example, if it turned out that all Ajnatasthanis lacked an internal organ, such as the appendix, or that their hands generally had six fingers and their feet four toes, or that all Ajnatasthanis were mute, so that they had to communicate through sign language rather than through vocalized speech, that would be a matter of some interest. But human beings can generally be taken to be organisms that share a certain genetic history and makeup. Given that genetic history and makeup, we would expect the number of empirical corrections to our inferences about Ajnatasthanis to be relatively small. The vast majority of our inferences about them should stand uncorrected. In this sense, we can say that

make about the chemical features of a natural kind like water are stronger—because invariant given the same circumstances—than those that one can make about a natural kind like human being. One can be sure that water that is 100 percent $H_2O$ will freeze at zero degrees Celsius. One can be less certain that human beings will have, let us say, four wisdom teeth. Indeed, I have never had more than three. That is because, unlike $H_2O$, the causal mechanism responsible for the structure of human beings, human DNA, is subject to variation.

the concept "human being" is inference-rich. That is generally true of concepts that denote what some philosophers call natural kinds.[37]

Now consider the quite different statement, "Ajnatasthanis are religious." According to normal conventions, we could then speak of Ajnatasthani religion(s), or the religion(s) of Ajnatasthan.[38] For the sake of convenience, let us simply speak of Ajnatasthani religion in the singular. What can we infer from the statement that "Ajnatasthanis are religious" or the concept "Ajnatasthani religion"? Very little, if anything at all.[39] That is, among other things, simply a recognition of Jonathan Z. Smith's observation that religion can be defined in fifty different ways and more besides.[40] We know, of course, that some people insist on defining religion as involving culturally postulated superhuman beings. If one of these people were to state, "Ajnatasthanis are religious," we would be inclined to infer that Ajnatasthanis knew culturally postulated superhuman beings. But even then we might be cautious, because we know that people can be inconsistent in their use of words and that they can also change their minds. Indeed, people with specific ideas about religion generally acknowledge, if only tacitly, that their particular use of the term is not the only possible one, because they often write, "By religion I mean. . . ." We know that some people in our linguistic community deny that the cultural postulation of superhuman beings is a necessary feature of "religion."[41] Indeed, some people deny that "religion" has any necessary features at all. They prefer to say, with a nod in the direction of Ludwig Wittgenstein, that what defines religion is a collection of features—all of which strike me as almost equally vague—a sufficient but rarely specified number of which are responsible for making an instance that we encounter "religious."[42] It is perhaps less well known that for

37. In the terminology of Ruth Millikan, species are not eternal kinds (like water) but historical kinds, but we can leave that distinction aside.

38. If pressed, I would actually prefer to speak about religion among Ajnatasthanis, but I do not think that this nicety of expression is particularly significant to the argument.

39. Ivan Strenski represents the phenomenologists of religion as identifying religion's organic structures; see Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006). To the extent that this is an accurate representation, it points out how misguided the phenomenological project was. Unlike people, religion has no such organs. If it did, we would be able to postulate that Ajnatasthani religion had them.

40. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84, esp. 281, referring to a list of definitions that James H. Leuba gives in an appendix to *The Psychological Study of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1912).

41. For an example of this move by people engaged in the cognitive study of religion, see Carl Seaquist, "Mind Design and the Capacity for Ritual Performance," in *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion*, vol. 2, *The Neurology of Religious Experience*, ed. Patrick McNamara (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006).

42. A relatively early instance of this approach is William P. Alston, "Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 7, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 140–45, esp. 141–42.

a somewhat sizable body of philosophers and cognitive psychologists even such an approach states too much. They argue that very few words, including scientific terms, actually have definitions, and that human beings can and routinely do learn and use concepts that are not defined by sets of features, however complexly derived or organized. If pressed for an example of such a thinker, I might name Ruth Millikan, for whom what I am calling inference-richness is a characteristic of "substances," a class of concepts that includes "th[ose] extensive categor[ies] consisting of items about which it is possible to learn from one encounter something about what to expect on other encounters."[43] On her view, "To have a concept of a certain substance is not to have a certain set of properties in mind, whether derived from paradigm cases or exemplars."[44] Rather, it is to have the ability reliably to recognize instances of the concept.

I realize that calling religion an inference-poor concept might create problems for some people.[45] That is especially true of verificationists, for whom concepts mean just what we can infer from them—or, rather, for whom the meaning of concepts is determined by the procedures that we would in principle use to verify inferences associated with the concept (in principle because these procedures might not actually be available to us at any given moment). In that case, if from the statement "Ajnatasthanis are religious" we can infer virtually nothing, then, assuming normal relations between the adjective "religious" and the noun "religion," the word "religion" is, like R. B. Braithwaite's famous cosmic gardener,[46] virtually meaningless. I happen not to share this approach to meaning, but that is a discussion for another day.

Furthermore, calling religion an inference-poor concept does not mean that there are no good reasons to use it. For example, the concept "religion" may

43. Millikan, "Common Structure for Concepts," 528. Elsewhere, Millikan identifies three kinds of substances, historical kinds, eternal kinds, and individuals, although without further glossing the terminology is probably misleading; see Millikan, *Language*, 106–20.

44. Millikan, *Language*, 112.

45. Others, such as Timothy Fitzgerald, Daniel Dubuisson, and S. N. Balagangadhara, object to "religion" not on the grounds of inference-poorness but on the grounds of inference-richness; the term implies too much. As a matter of history it is quite clear that certain conceptualizations of "religion" have led people to attribute features where they did not belong. I doubt, however, that such inferences are a necessary aspect of "religion." For example, Fitzgerald's claim that the term "religion" always carries with it the political notion of secularity as developed in Europe and North America is, I think, much too specific. While all words must exclude in order to include, they do not usually do so as one half of a tight, dyadic pair; consider "red" or "dog." Even some of those who contributed significantly to now-objectionable early twentieth-century conceptualizations of religion did not fully embrace the distinction Fitzgerald champions. For example, for most of his life Rudolf Otto rejected the ideals of political secularity and the separation of church and state along with other elements of what he called "Manchester liberalism," and he did so despite all the roadblocks that conservative bureaucrats in the Prussian Ministry of education and religious affairs put in the way of his career. For him, religion and politics were and should always remain intertwined.

46. R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955).

allow us to stipulate that some convictions and actions deserve special legal recognition and protection, as in freedom of religion. (This points, in fact, to one set of inferences that we *can* draw from "religion," inferences about how certain people think something should be treated once it is identified as religion.) For example, imagine a group of teachers pondering the following questions: Why did Lana not attend school today? (It was Yom Kippur.) Why does Mousa refuse to eat pork? (It is not halal.) Why did Sarah come to school last spring with a dirty forehead? (It was Ash Wednesday.) Why does Yurendra refuse to eat "cow"? (He is Hindu.) The answers in parentheses do provide detailed information about Lana's, Mousa's, Sarah's, and Yuri's motives, but in each case they may miss a more cogent point that a vaguer answer would capture: "religious reasons." That would certainly be true if all four kinds of behavior annoyed the teachers, so that they were plotting to punish Lana for her absence, scrub Sarah's forehead next time she came to school with ashes on it, and try to force Mousa and Yuri to eat pork and beef. (Assume for the sake of argument that all the teachers recognize the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.)[47]

True, just because we can use a concept does not mean that we should do so. I am certainly willing to entertain the notion that we might in the end want to abandon the concept "religion." But at the moment I do not have my sights set on that radical option. I am only interested in what, for people who persist in using the term, the character of "religion" as inference-poor implies for what I have been calling Joachim Wach's unfinished project. Here are three implications that I see.

### *Implication One*

We are more interested in describing instances of inference-poor concepts than in describing instances of inference-rich ones. The reason is relatively simple. We acquire no new knowledge by describing the basic physical properties of, for example, the water in every glass we drink or the details of each and every Ajnatasthani's skeletal structure. That is because water and human beings are, to use Millikan's terminology, substances.[48] The case of inference-poor concepts, however, is different. We do acquire new knowledge from describing instances of them. That is because we are describing features that we cannot reliably anticipate.

In the case of "religion," then, we are on territory somewhat familiar from Friedrich Max Müller. It is not quite correct to say, with Müller, "Whoever

47. Not everyone does recognize the declaration. Among people trained in the history of religions, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan recommends abandoning talk of religious freedom in favor of equality; see *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

48. See above, note 43. It is perhaps more normal to say that they are natural kinds, but substance will do for now.

knows one religion knows none." It would be more accurate to say, "Whoever knows one religion knows only one religion." From the knowledge that instance *x* counts as a religion, there is no way to predict many, if any, features of any other instance *y*. (Note that one can make many probable inferences from a concept like "Christianity.") Indeed, one consequence of the increased encounter of Europeans with other people that began in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries has been just this: the more instances of religion we have come to know, the fewer the inferences we have felt entitled to draw from "religion." Whether we know one instance of religion or a hundred, we will still be unable to infer much that is meaningful about Ajnatasthani religion from the statement "Ajnatisthanis are religious." In this respect religion is rather unlike language, despite some scholars' fondness for drawing analogies between the two. According to Chomsky, if not Goethe, we can learn some important properties of language from a single instance and extrapolate them to other instances. We cannot do that with religion.[49]

The description of instances of religion opens the door to rich and complex scholarly activity. That is in part because, as Fred Dretske has made a career of pointing out, seeing is not always "seeing as." It is possible to see an armadillo but not see it *as* an armadillo—or as much of anything at all. For example, we may not recognize that what we are seeing is an armadillo because we have never heard of armadillos and are encountering one for the first time, or we may be thoroughly familiar with armadillos but simply not attend to the armadillo in our field of vision. Natural selection has endowed human beings, like other organisms, with perceptual systems that are quick and generally reliable. But knowledge about instances of religion involves more than just perception; it involves language and reflection. Such knowledge is subject to more errors and is generally more slowly acquired than perceptual knowledge. A moment's attention is usually sufficient to recognize that one is perceiving one's spouse. (One might need more time if, for example, one's spouse had an identical twin or suddenly underwent plastic surgery or radically changed her or his hair color.) But we may observe a religious object for years and still not be quite sure about what we are observing. Simply having our attention drawn to a religious object and learning a name for it may leave us as mystified as when we started. Indeed, these possibilities have led some to distinguish between lower- and higher-order descriptions in the study of religion, that is, between description, interpretation, and comparison.

A major task of the study of religions, then, is to describe specific instances of religion. It is this feature, I think, that has been responsible, at least in part, for

49. We might be able to do so for constituents of religion, like "superhuman agent concepts," but then we are dealing with a kind of concept, not a kind of religion.

so many scholars of religions being attracted to words like "unique" and "nonreductionist." Such adjectives capture our interest in individual instances. The same feature, I think, has also been responsible for scholars of religions being intrigued by the somewhat confused claim that there is no such thing as religion, only religions or religious things. There is no such thing as kangaroo, either. There are only kangaroos and kangaroo-ish things (e.g., the small stuffed kangaroo doll that a student brought back for me from Australia). But no one seems to care, in part because "kangaroo" is a natural kind or, in Millikan's terms, a substance and so relatively inference-rich. The good news is that to the extent that the study of religions is descriptive, it will never cease. So long as society sees utility in using the category "religion" and paying people to describe instances of it, we will all have jobs. The bad news, of course, is that we are left awash in a sea of description, and solid land on which to place our feet seems hard to come by.

### *Implication Two*

The inference-poorness of religion dooms certain projects to fail. One of them is Wach's project to construct a universal typology of religion. Another is Eliade's morphology of the sacred, at least as an account of something called *homo religiosus*, if the statement "Ajnatasthanis are religious" implies that Ajnatasthanis belong to the class *homo religiosus*. Inasmuch as my theme here is Wach, however, I will not discuss Eliade further.

As we know, Wach saw religion as resulting from a particular kind of experience. We might say that Wach was postulating a mechanism to account for religion.[50] Now it is true that Wach's characterizations of religious experience leave much to be desired. What is an ultimate reality, that we may experience it? But making that observation simply leaves Wach's project unfinished. It holds open the possibility that with enough friendly tweaking Wach's project might succeed. What I want to do is close off that possibility—to finish, as it were, this part of Wach's unfinished project.

If we could construct a mechanism to account for what we observe about religion as a whole and only for religion, religion would exhibit certain regularities. In that case religion would be a substance or natural kind, and we would be able to make inferences from the statement "Ajnatasthanis are religious," just as we can make inferences from the analysis of water as $H_2O$. For better or for worse, however, we cannot make such inferences about Ajnatasthani

50. Jonathan Z. Smith has been using the word "map," but I think "mechanism" is better. The customary way to offer explanations throughout the academy is to identify mechanisms. In principle these mechanisms are nonobservable; one cannot observe a cause. They are also constructs that explain what we observe, not reproductions of our observations.

religion. We might conclude, therefore, that there is no mechanism. The usual way to approach this question, however, is the other way around. We do not conclude that a concept is inference-poor because we can construct no mechanism for it; we construct mechanisms to explain our ability to make inferences from a concept. We may not know, for example, what smallpox is, but we do have a concept of smallpox, and that concept allows us to make some inferences about people who have smallpox and to discover more.[51] In that case we construct mechanisms to account for what we are able to infer. Apparently the current best account attributes smallpox to the variola virus. But in the absence of inferred regularities, as in the case of religion (not necessarily its constituent elements), we have nothing to construct a mechanism for.

The reason that Wach's project of constructing a universal typology of religion is doomed to fail should now be apparent. A typology, such as the periodic table or the biological classification of organisms, attempts to systematize inferences—observed regularities, if you will—that the operation of underlying causal mechanisms makes possible.[52] Religion lacks such inferences. Therefore, there can be no universal typology of religion.

That does, however, present a quandary. How is one to describe specific instances of religion? Should one simply describe them in their own terms?

51. Millikan's distinction between a concept and conceptualization is relevant here. At one point in time (I do not know quite when; my knowledge of medical history is shady), people knew what smallpox was—they had the concept "smallpox"—but their conceptualization of smallpox was limited. They could make some inferences. For example, they could identify the disease from the symptoms, and, having done so, they could infer the long-term consequences, presumably scars or death. The possession of a concept with stable inferences allowed them to look for a causal mechanism to explain the operation of the disease, presumably the variola virus, and to develop a vaccine. Such an account makes possible many more inferences, for example, inferences about the disease's epidemiology. In describing what has occurred, it is probably better to say that the conceptualization of "smallpox" has changed rather than that one concept, $smallpox_1$, has been replaced by another, $smallpox_2$. Otherwise, any change in knowledge, no matter how small, will require a change in concepts. Have I acquired a new concept, "$my\ cup_2$," because I thought there was tea in my cup and now I find that it is empty? Does the brain really constantly erase and rewrite concepts in this way? It seems a very clunky model of mental functioning.

52. Perhaps the following observations can make this point clearer:

> Experts in some domain . . . can see connections where novices notice none because their theories lead them to look for certain similarities, regularities, and cause-effect relations. For example, biologists notice crucial similarities between shrimps, moths, grasshoppers, spiders, and crabs, putting them together in one class (the arthropods). We assume that naive observers would make more pragmatic distinctions, probably separating the flying, crawling, and water-living animals. The biologist's theories of evolution and physiological structures express themselves in the concept of the arthropods and would come into play explicitly when categorizing unfamiliar objects. (Murphy and Medin, "The Role of Theories," 443)

In formulating a typology of religious leaders, upon what body of theory could Wach rely that would allow him to move from categorizing them as living in air, land, and water to categorizing them as arthropods? I address that question shortly, but for now I simply observe that it cannot be a theory specific to religion, precisely because the concept does not have the kinds of similarities, regularities, and cause-effect relations to which Murphy and Medin point. How do we know this? If such things were present, they would necessarily result in inferences about Ajnatasthani religion. But there are no such inferences.

Should I, for example, take some understudied group, such as the Rāṭhvas, *ādivāsīs* or tribal people who live in Vadodara and Panch Mahals districts of Gujarat, and simply describe what strikes me as their religion, using the language of the Rāṭhvas, Rāṭhvī, for all operative terms?

Nothing in principle forbids this practice. Terms can be and often are transferred from one linguistic code to another. I did that just now in using the term *ādivāsī* and then roughly glossing it.[53] Indeed, transferring words in this way would seem to be not only customary but often best practice in the study of religion, as when in discussing traditional Hindu social categories, one speaks of *varṇas* and *jātis, brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas*, and *śūdras* instead of trying to find English equivalents for any of these words, because English equivalents are likely to be misleading. Similarly, in speaking of what Wach might have called religious leaders among *ādivāsīs* in western India, it is probably better to speak of *bhagats, baḍvas, pūjāras, mahārājas* (in this context a *mahārāja* is a minor ritual functionary), and so on rather than of priests, shamans, and witch doctors, although English speakers in the area use these terms, too.[54]

Simply transferring operative terms from the areas we study to the languages we write and speak does, however, have disadvantages. One is that it would seem to eliminate what Wach called the systematic side of *Religionswissenschaft*. Religious studies would be little more than a very large set of loosely connected or disconnected microstudies. Another is that it provides no way of negotiating the naming explosion. Rather, it would accelerate (or, at least, perpetuate) it, resulting in an overburdening surfeit of concepts. Indeed, although these studies and their embedded concepts would provide new knowledge, one would expect that people would rather quickly grow tired of them, the way they lose interest in a slide-illustrated travelogue that goes on too long.

It may be possible to discover natural kinds or substances in the materials that scholars of religion study. Perhaps Pascal Boyer's "counterintuitive concepts" is an example.[55] In that case it would make little difference what language gave us the terms we used, just as it makes little difference whether we call the element whose nucleus contains eight protons "oxygen," *Sauerstoff*, or *yǎng*. But many, perhaps the vast majority, of the concepts that we use in the study of religion do not denote natural kinds or substances. At most they mark

53. The term literally means "original or first inhabitants," but like the term "tribal people," that phrase, too, requires further clarification.

54. I have drawn these terms from Ganesh N. Devy, *A Nomad Called Thief: Reflections on Adivasi Silence* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006), 98, 114, 117–18.

55. This is not quite Boyer's terminology, but for the present we can ignore disputes over minimally versus maximally counterintuitive concepts.

off classes. (I actually think that many concepts in the study of religion are neither kinds nor classes; "religion" is an example. But let us limit attention here to classes.) Unlike natural kinds or substances, classes are not inference-rich. They permit only a limited set of inferences, namely, inferences of the features that mark off the boundaries of the class. For example, it would seem possible to make the following inferences about instances of the class "red triangles," and only the following inferences: they are red, and they are triangles.[56] This characteristic of classes complicates attempts at translation, description, and analysis. Among other things, it introduces two difficulties that I think are implicit in Wach's paper shuffling.

One difficulty concerns nomenclature. Scholars of religion have not created a metalanguage. Instead, they have generally taken their words for classes from a specific religion or culture. But like specific instances of the class "red triangles," say, a red isosceles triangle made of wood that stands three feet tall and is used as a rather odd window, these terms are generally too inference-rich. That results in the kinds of difficulties familiar, for example, from Émile Durkheim's reference to "a single moral community called a Church,"[57] or James Mooney's reference to "the chief high priest of the Ghost dance."[58] The terms "Church" and "chief high priest" simply do not work. They are too inference-rich; they imply too much. It would be rather ethnocentric to blame such difficulties on the use of "Western" terminology. "Non-Western" terminology is no better. Try using the term *baḍvo* to denote what we might otherwise call "priests," or rather, what traditional Rāṭhvas might refer to as *baḍva* in a comparative context. That term, too, permits too many inferences. For Rāṭhvas it denotes a very specific kind of functionary, with a particular kind of knowledge. Others who use the term may see *baḍva* differently. According to gujaratilexicon.com (consulted April 2009) the word may denote (as an adjective) "having one's head shaven; ugly," and, as a masculine noun, "boy who is being invested with sacred thread; piece of peeled sugarcane." None of these senses is appropriate in a Rāṭhva context. For example, traditional *baḍva* have long hair. Each of them has features far beyond those that would lead us or traditional Rāṭhvas to classify a Roman Catholic priest and a Rāṭhva *baḍvo* as belonging to the same class. (Assume for the sake of argument that this is a nontrivial classification.) When scholars decide to use a nonoriginal term in translations and descriptions—and there are many reasons that they might do so—the choice of term would

56. Instead of speaking of instances of classes, it might sound more Wachian to speak of tokens of types.

57. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1947), 61.

58. James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 847.

seem to be as much a matter of art as of science. The art consists of selecting nonoriginal terms that are most likely to evoke in the target audience an appropriate range of inferences, even if they do not evoke the very same inferences. The usefulness of that choice is always context-specific.

A second difficulty with classes helps explain why scholars of religion have not created a metalanguage. Unlike natural kinds or substances, classes do not refer to unities that exist in the world as such. There are few if any objective clues about what class concepts scholars of religion should use. The choice of class concepts permits significant variation based upon the utility of the concepts for the particular project under way (which of course is itself always subject to critique). In this sense, the hope underlying Wach's typology, that it would provide a standard terminology based on religious reality upon which all scholars of religion might agree, is misplaced. There can be no such typology. There can only be shared concepts for shared projects. Like Wach's, anyone else's paper shuffling will result in similarly idiosyncratic lists. Those who entertain mistaken notions about the kinds of concepts scholars of religion use may find such class concepts unacceptable. They may advocate that scholars of religion abandon class concepts and think, write, and speak only in terms of natural kinds or substances. Such people need to stop thinking that they are sitting on chairs.

### *Implication Three*

All students in the Wach tradition know the German word *Religionswissenschaft*, "science of religion." As some readers may remember, Wach's own goal was to foster an integral science of religion, a *Religionswissenschaft* that integrated the approaches of history, phenomenology, psychology, and sociology. But—to adapt a question from Hans Penner and Edward Yonan[59]—is an integral science of religion possible? The answer partly depends upon which concept the word "science" targets. If by science one means careful, methodical investigation in an academic setting that is careful not to outrun claims that can legitimately count as knowledge (and so far as I can see, theology and its equivalents in various religious traditions often do quickly outrun these claims), perhaps an integral science of religion is possible, provided the investigator exercises vigilance and self-control. In that case, however, "science" encompasses many scholarly activities that we do not normally designate with the word. If by science one means what the word usually means in English,

59. Hans H. Penner and Edward A. Yonan, "Is a Science of Religion Possible?" *Journal of Religion* 52, no. 2 (April 1972): 107–33.

the answer is clearly no, an integral science of religion is not possible. Having written enough already about the first option, I want to reflect just a little on the second.

The clause "what the word 'science' usually means in English" reads easily enough, but what does it mean? That may not be entirely clear. People conceptualize science differently. No surprise here. People conceptualize most concepts differently. Half a century ago the standard views of science, associated with figures like Karl Popper and Carl Hempel, built upon the rigors of logical deduction, the hypothetical-deductive model of scientific discovery, and the deductive-nomological model of scientific explanation. These models were not entirely satisfactory. There are very few successful examples of scientific laws that can act as premises, and much actual science does not concern itself with hypotheses that one formulates in terms of logical deduction.[60]

I prefer a model that sees science as seeking to explain observed regularities by constructing mechanisms to account for them. But here I want to make a broader point: however one conceptualizes it, science in this sense has to do with understanding a subset of the concepts that Millikan calls substances, namely, kinds (both kinds that have essences, like water, and "historical" kinds, like species of plants and animals).[61] As Millikan observes, substances "are the seeds on which all empirical knowledge is built."[62] Without substances, there can be no science.[63] Another way to say this is that science presupposes natural kinds. That is because science explains inferable (or, in an alternative terminology, projectable) properties, which are characteristic of natural kinds. Religion, however, is not a natural kind; it has no inferable or projectable properties for an integral, unified science of religion to explain. Lee Kirkpatrick, writing against the notion that religion is an evolutionary adaptation, makes a similar point with the help of the analogy of "skin irregularities": "There can be no singular, coherent theory about the adaptive value of [religion, just as there can be none about the adaptive value of] 'skin irregularities' because this motley collection of phenomena do not in fact constitute a natural category of things sharing a single common cause or set of causes."[64]

60. The result is what looks like awfully odd science to me; for attempts to work out such a model rigorously, see Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), and, slightly less rigorous, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

61. Although Millikan recognizes "individuals" as substances, because inferences about an individual that are true today are likely true tomorrow, we do not generally recognize a science of individuals.

62. Millikan, *Language*, 108, 114.

63. Millikan, *On Clear and Confused Ideas*, 208.

64. Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Religion Is Not an Adaptation," in *Where God and Science Meet: How Brain and Evolutionary Studies Alter Our Understanding of Religion*, vol. 1, *Evolution, Genes, and the Religious Brain*, ed. Patrick McNamara (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 176.

To the extent that different kinds of skin irregularities are natural kinds, it is possible, of course, to identify multiple mechanisms responsible for them. Examples might include scabs, calluses, and bruises, as well as the sunlight-related keratoses and basal cells that seem to grow all too easily on my skin. In its relation to science, religion is in a position similar to that of "skin irregularities" but more complicated, not only because it involves significantly more complex systems but also because, unlike "skin irregularities," religion is not a feature-defined class. Science in this sense can certainly deal with the objects that our word "religion" bundles together, but it cannot do so as an integral science of religion. Rather, it must study them as instances of natural kinds that result from the operation of their own nonreligious mechanisms. This, I think, is responsible for the observation, made sometimes with lamentation, at other times with delight, that the most productive theoretical resources in the study of religion have not been produced by scholars of religion but by scholars in other fields. This may or may not be a defect of the study of religion, but it is certainly one of its necessary features.

Let me add two last points. It follows from what I have written that, despite the phenomenological tradition, the natural kinds of which religious objects are instances—the types of which they are tokens—will not be specifically religious kinds or types. That does not mean that it will never be useful to demarcate a certain subset of instances or tokens as religious. But demarcating a religious subset within a natural kind does not entail the existence of specifically religious mechanisms. If it did, religion would not be the inference-poor term that it is. Rather, we may usefully employ "religion" to refer to a subset of instances that results from, let us say, distinctive operating positions of the mechanism that is responsible for the kind in question. For example, Pascal Boyer, Scott Atran, and others in the cognitive science of religion identify certain concepts as religious not because a unique mechanism underlies them but because they result from the distinctive operation of the mechanism that produces all concepts or certain types of concepts, such as agency concepts. The science of religion will only be integrated to the extent that the sciences whose job it is to study the various kinds represented in the bundle "religion" are themselves integrated.

Second, scholars of religion should be prepared to recognize that what appears to them as a single kind may turn out to be more complex. That is because apparently similar observed regularities may result from the operation of different mechanisms. A classic example outside of the study of religion is jade, which was considered for centuries to be a single mineral. (It is actually two different minerals with ordinary features so similar that it is difficult to tell them apart.) Another example is epilepsy, the "sacred disease," as

the Greeks called it, which may seem like a single disease but is actually a classic set of symptoms with any number of different causes, some of them still unknown. So, too, what appears to be the same religious feature may result from the operation of different mechanisms in different circumstances. For example, consider religious "belief." People entertain certain counterintuitive concepts, such as God, with conviction; others, such as Superman, do not enjoy the same stature. What is responsible for what some philosophers might refer to as the association of the propositional attitude "belief" with some but not other conceptual content? Given the complexity of human mental processing, I would not be surprised if the answer turned out to be, a variety of different mechanisms.

The position I have just sketched, of course, leads to a vexing conundrum for modern religious studies: "reductionism."[65] Some ("phenomenologists") insist upon a nonreductionistic study of religion, others ("naturalists") that science must reduce, because reduction is what science does. Neither position is satisfactory. To take the second first, science does not require reductionism. (Does anyone outside of religious studies ever invoke Carl Hempel anymore?) Even if it were possible to give an account of each and every biological thing and process in terms of chemistry, that would not obligate biologists to limit themselves to speaking "chemistry." There are questions for which analysis on the biological rather than the chemical level still remains the most useful approach. Indeed, some make the credible claim that combining various elements into a single mechanism results in realities that did not previously exist. At the same time, that observation does not issue the cease-and-desist order for which antireductionists long. Just because I *can* analyze the world of living organisms in biological terms does not mean that no one should study biochemistry. It is tragic that so much ink has been spilled in the study of religion over this dichotomy.

## Final Remarks

It may seem that in the course of this essay I have explicitly rejected Wach's project in its entirety, and implicitly rejected Eliade's as well. This appearance is false. I could have simply rejected talk of religion altogether, but I have not. For all its faults, I still find the concept "religion" useful, unlike the concept "phlogiston."

65. A topic on which Wach also weighed in: "'Nur': Gedanken über den Psychologismus," *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* (Berlin) 39 (1924): 209–15.

It is true that I have rejected major portions of Wach's project, and these rejections are significant enough to seem like something more than friendly amendments. Nevertheless, like Wach's *Habilitationsschrift* (1924), but at much less length and probably with much less persuasive force, my concern has been to lay some ground for the study of religions. In the end, the fundamental divisions of Wach's *Religionswissenschaft*, the historical and the systematic, still remain, albeit under different names, with different rationales, and with a different vision of how they fit together than the sloganlike "integrated understanding," which insists that we must somehow unite history, phenomenology, psychology, and sociology, but never says how. I do not claim that my views are entirely original. They are not. Nor do I claim that my arguments are airtight; I am trying some of them out for the first time. I also suspect that some people will reject any argument that relies heavily upon inferences about such unusual people as the Ajnatasthanis and their religion. I may offer these reflections as a way to finish off some aspects of Wach's unfinished project, but in a broader sense I also offer them as a way of coming one or two steps closer to completing it.

# 4

# Wach, Radhakrishnan, and Relativism

*Charles S. Preston*

In the later works of Joachim Wach, the Indian philosopher and statesman Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan appears sporadically yet significantly as a representative of a relativistic approach to world religions. Radhakrishnan's thoughts must have been of considerable importance to Wach, since he wrote an article concerning them in a volume about Radhakrishnan published in 1952[1] and referred to it significantly in another essay[2] that Joseph Kitagawa and Gregory Alles reprinted posthumously in a collection of Wach's essays.[3] In this essay, I attempt to read the philosophical and subtextual issues at stake for Wach in the study of religions and interreligious dialogue through his work on Radhakrishnan. Of most prominent interest here is Wach's essay on Radhakrishnan, Radhakrishnan's response in the same volume, and Wach's attempt both to maintain a supposed relativist standpoint and yet to critique Radhakrishnan's relativism. My thoughts stem from five main questions: How does Radhakrishnan serve Wach's polemic against relativism? How does Wach's Christianity surface in dialogue with Radhakrishnan? How does Wach characterize and critique his interlocutor? How does this

1. Joachim Wach, "Radhakrishnan and the Comparative Study of Religion," in *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor, 1952).

2. Joachim Wach, "The Problem of Truth in Religion," in *Understanding and Believing*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1968).

3. Joachim Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory D. Alles (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

interchange serve the assessment of Wach's legacy? How does their interchange inform the ongoing debate over issues of relativism in current methodological standards in the study of religion? My conclusion is that Wach's Christianity and Euro-American ethnocentrism are the impetus behind his antirelativism, and that while relativism has its flaws, it intends to prevent exactly the kind of distorting discourse evidenced by some of Wach's later work.

Joseph Kitagawa outlined three phases of Wach's work. In the first phase Wach favored the descriptive over the normative study of religion, and the second phase was characterized by a more systematic approach typified by his *Sociology of Religion*.[4] The third and final phase, which corresponds to Wach's tenure at the University of Chicago, saw Wach stressing the soteriological nature of religion, opposing relativism, providing a place for evaluation in the study of religion, and giving increased weight to the subjective dimension of the inquirer.[5] Also during this period, the question "What think you of Christ?"—which he drew from Rudolf Otto and made a crucial point in his article on Radhakrishnan—was of primary concern for Wach.[6] It was during this third and final phase that Wach wrote about Radhakrishnan, and thus it is in this context of increased emphasis on normativity and the centrality of Christianity for Wach that I read his remarks. It is also of that later body of work and thought specifically that I am critical.

Relativism is a frequent target of Wach's censure. Always trying to chart a middle course, Wach speaks of a dialectic between social context, which is particular, and religious experience, which involves revelation and the universal. Relativism, to Wach, suggests religion's dependence on society and history and elides the universal and experiential. In the context of his discussion of relativism in *The Comparative Study of Religion*, Wach refers to his previous article concerning Radhakrishnan and proceeds to argue that, should one emphasize sociohistorical influences on religion, which he defines as Marxist, it risks becoming deterministic and discounting the important element of spontaneity in religion. He held that religion is spontaneous, creative, and free but "related" to its context.[7] Just what he means by "related" is rather unclear, but leaving it vague allows him to avoid trapping religion and society in a direct, closed, causal relation. I do not disagree with this point in principle; turning history, cultures, and people into automatons acting out a predetermined dialogic between history and religion presupposes a transhistorical entity that, if accepted, would

4. Joseph Kitagawa, introduction to Joachim Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph Kitagawa and Gregory Alles (New York: Macmillan, 1988), xix.

5. Ibid., xxv, xxvii.

6. Ibid., xxx.

7. Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, ed. Joseph Kitagawa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 56–57.

render the historical study of religion both religious and ahistoric. The problem is that loosening the connection for Wach allows the general and the particular, what he sees as universally true and what context skews from truth, to coexist in such a way that the variations and "degradations" of the particular are disconnected from what he considers most true, that is, Christianity, which itself, by being uprooted from context by Wach, becomes cast as a transhistorical entity. With the wedge of the experiential between the universal and the particular, Wach makes room for evaluation in the scholastic enterprise and provides room for a normative intercessor in the guise of the historian of religions.

Another example of Wach's articulation of both relativity and normativity is his concept of the classical, which is "paradoxically" both relative and normative—relative in terms of describing the "types" in specific religions yet normative in the usage of the classical for pedagogical purposes or to inform one's own theological thought.[8] The idea of the classical, an example of Wach's systematizing tendencies, imagines crystallizations from the vicissitudes of history that are both historical and specific yet ahistorical and generalizable. The normative aspect here is, on my account, precisely what makes Wach's project a theological one and not a historical study of religion.

A third example of Wach's take on relativism is his idea of "relative relativism" proposed briefly in a footnote in his *Introduction to the History of Religions*. In contrast to the proposal put forth by each specific religion that it is the height of human religious achievement, and in contrast to the opinion (which Radhakrishnan subscribed to) that all religions are headed teleologically toward a unified zenith of perfection, Wach writes that "'relative relativism' wishes not to renounce ordering principles . . . [but] to avoid the forced character and the 'perspectivism' of 'absolute relativism.' It is 'centralistic' but at the same time 'pluralistic.'"[9] Again, he seems to want a middle path of a moderate relativism, but precisely for normative reasons. It is not evident that Wach suggests this scholium seriously as a solution. Yet given what has been suggested of Wach's increased interest in normativity and Christianity, this model of religions allows him both to be apparently ecumenical and to maintain the superiority and centrality of Christianity.

As I read Wach's essay "Radhakrishnan and the Comparative Study of Religion," Radhakrishnan serves as an exemplia gratia for Wach's arguments against relativism. In his prolific writings, Radhakrishnan urged religions to come together, uniting in an individual truth with varied expressions such that

8. Joachim Wach, "The Concept of the Classical," in *Types of Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 51–52.

9. Wach, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, 210n9.

a new, unified form could assuage interreligious conflict.[10] For Radhakrishnan, the ideal is a unified religion—not just mutual tolerance but a syncretism that leads to the ultimate truth. Each religion is equally in the possession of the universal truth, albeit a limited and contextual one. Mutual exchange, he believed, would be beneficial to humanity. Wach responds that what is at stake in the philosophical study of religions is not "sharing" but the issues of validity and truth.[11] Rather than extol the benefits of exchange, Wach favors the exploration of the normative value of each religion, to fit them into a categorical hierarchy.

Wach saw misinterpretations and degradations in religion that encouraged him to contend that not all religions are equal. The issue transcends the mere methodological problem of how to regard other religions from the standpoint of scholarship (see later discussion) and hinges instead on the issue of degrees of truth. This view of a continuum of religions in which Christianity holds the highest place was typical among the Liberal Protestants who constituted the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule of which Wach was an heir.[12] Wach writes that "what is at stake is the question of whether or not a particular historic faith reveals adequately the nature of the Divine."[13] He argues for the "universal availability of true religious insight,"[14] which cannot be evaluated on a relativistic model. The key terms "adequately" and "availability" imply equal access for all religions, but that not all religions have attained true insight, thus blocking relativism and insisting upon a hierarchical valuation of religions as would be conducive to normative intervention.

In response to Radhakrishnan's relativistic reduction of Christianity to a level on a par with Hinduism, Wach becomes most defensive and supportive of Christianity. Wach found particularly bothersome Radhakrishnan's idea of uniting "the best elements of Hinduism with the good points of Christianity."[15] While Wach sympathizes with Radhakrishnan, whom he understands to be reacting to overzealous missionary work—and certainly much of Radhakrishnan's thought is a reaction to colonialism—Wach held that "sharing" is not the only option.[16] Instead, Wach thinks that the "sharing" Radhakrishnan has in mind is Hindu in spirit, and thus belies a Hindu prejudice. Wach begins his critique by pointing out that Radhakrishnan's Hinduism is primarily Brahmanism and Śaṅkara's

10. Wach, "Radhakrishnan and Comparative Study," 445.
11. Ibid., 450.
12. S. N. Balagangadhara, *"The Heathen in His Blindness . . ."* (Delhi: Manohar, 2005), 177, 199.
13. Wach, "The Problem of Truth in Religion," 148.
14. Ibid., emphasis in original.
15. Wach, "Radhakrishnan and Comparative Study," 456.
16. Ibid., 448–49.

Advaita Vedānta, to the exclusion of other philosophies and medieval Hinduism.[17] He imagines that Radhakrishnan, during his education on Christianity by missionaries in India, encountered a Christian apologetic that painted Christianity as pure and good, and Hinduism as dark and evil, and thus it was natural for Radhakrishnan's writings to have a "notable trace of bitterness."[18] It would also thus be natural for the philosopher to promote a form of Hinduism that is its perceived essence (Brahmanism), through the channel of Śaṅkara's nondual Advaita philosophy of nondifferentiation, which Radhakrishnan then extended to the field of comparative religions and surfaces as a spiritual teleology where the unified end is achieved through mutual exchange of religious ideas. Yet Wach asks of this "sharing," "Why not in the Spirit of Christ?"[19]

The problem, for Wach, is that he does not see Hinduism as a possible "spirit" for this enterprise. Wach asserts that Radhakrishnan does not acknowledge the difference between Hinduism, which Wach typifies as tribally and nationally bound, and Christianity, which Wach views as a universal. Wach supports his dichotomous typology with the argument that Christianity is not limited in any way to the West and that there are Indian Christians.[20] In his writings, Wach defined Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam as "*universal options*"[21] with the notable exclusion of Hinduism. Furthermore, Wach held it to be impossible to ignore the question "What do you think of Christ?"[22] All are called to respond to this notion, he thought, and the Christian cannot abide demoting Christ to the level of other saints, religious figures, or avatars.[23] For Wach, Christianity comes closer to general revelation and truth and thus deserves an elevated position in the hierarchy and the discourse of world religions.

Wach's method of the history of religions regards the researcher's subjectivity as integral to the scholastic enterprise. In his concept of the hermeneutical circle, the researcher is called upon to react to and evaluate data of religion. The criteria for this reaction and evaluation are a scholar's a priori conceptions of religious experience, which one has to discover through the study of religions, but which are also inherently known. In the conclusion to *Types of Religious Experience Christian and Non-Christian*, published in 1951 and thus part of the later work under discussion, Wach avers: "A circle, though not necessarily a vicious one, seems to exist: if we desire to focus our investigation on

17. Ibid., 447.
18. Ibid., 448.
19. Ibid., 449.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 452, emphasis in original.
22. Ibid., 456.
23. Ibid., 454.

phenomena to be called religious, we have to proceed on the basis of some presuppositions as to their nature, and yet, in order to be able to articulate these presuppositions, we have to study the widest possible range of historical phenomena."[24] One could only enter this hermeneutic circle with a prior understanding of religious experience, even if that understanding was derived through the study itself. Furthermore, on Wach's account, this holotype of religious experience must be arrived at through normative statements of what is and is not true, true religious experience being the very object of study that the scholar is to identify and investigate. According to Wach, it is because we know the true nature of religious experience that we can recognize distortions of it.

Putting a pragmatic spin on his discussion of normativity, Wach felt that history qua history was no longer fruitful, and that the search for truth was necessary.[25] While arguing for the importance of the history of religions for theological studies, Wach quotes Horace's *Epistles* 18.84 (or perhaps Husserl's use of Horace's phrase?): "Tua res agitur,"[26] or, loosely, "Your matters are involved here." In Horace, the context is a fire in one's neighbor's house. For Wach, it means that the evaluation of the data culled from historical study is an integral part of the scholastic enterprise and also that it is precisely "your matters," your presuppositions, that are employed in understanding religious phenomena. The study of history also has to mean something for daily life,[27] for morality, for an understanding of truth. In other words, the history of religions needs to be put to work for theology, and vice versa. This normative exercise proceeds from an understanding of religious experience that is universal, essential, and true,[28] not to mention implicitly Christian.

Wach states that the evaluative norm for a Christian theologian would certainly be Jesus Christ,[29] and if one reads this statement back into the discussion with Radhakrishnan, it seems that it was as a theologian that Wach engaged with the Indian philosopher. As Charles Wood notes, Wach found himself in a new "theological situation" upon coming to Chicago, and it was there that he turned to concerns of the nature of religious experience and theology.[30] It is of no small import to note that Wach dedicated *Types of Religious Experience*

24. Joachim Wach, conclusion to *Types of Religious Experience Christian and Non-Christian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 228.

25. Ibid., 229.

26. Joachim Wach, "The Place of the History of Religions in the Study of Theology," in *Types of Religious Experience*, 7.

27. Joachim Wach, introduction, to *Types of Religious Experience*, xi.

28. Joachim Wach, "Universals in Religion," in *Types of Religious Experience*, 32–33.

29. Wach, conclusion to *Types of Religious Experience*, 230.

30. Charles M. Wood, *Theory and Understanding: A Critique of the Hermeneutics of Joachim Wach* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholar's Press, 1975), 24.

*Christian and Non-Christian* to "My Dear Colleagues of the Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago."[31] In fact, it is the irony of the book that one of its major assertions seems to be that the dichotomy of religious experience indicated in the title is not one of type, religious experience being universal, but a difference in validity.

According to Kitagawa, Wach is a "historian of religions who is interested in establishing a theological basis for his study."[32] This is the reason for his frequent discussion of revelation, particularly as it pertains to the question of relativism. Wach writes that general revelation has been of service to those in the history of religions counteracting historicism. He wishes to deny neither general revelation nor particular revelation. He is more interested in distinguishing between genuine and nongenuine revelation.[33] Thus the important issue becomes one of normativity. Yet general and particular revelation are important in that the answer directly affects how other religions are to be seen. Between the truth and special revelation (particular yet ultimate) of Christianity in Söderblom,[34] and the world faith of Hocking,[35] Wach follows Temple's formulation, which posits that "'either all occurrences are in some degree revelations of God or else there is no such revelation at all.'"[36] On this account, we must affirm that other religions stem from revelations in order to affirm the existence of revelation. Wach is committed to the truth of revelation, and thus must conclude that other religions have access to revelation, yet he maintains that there must be evaluation.

Still, in Wach's view, there is room for some particularization. Against Söderblom, who denies the influence of culture in religion, and Otto and van der Leeuw, who try to suggest a universal general revelation favoring Christianity,[37] Wach argues that there is particular revelation, though this does not make Christ "*one among many*," but instead Christianity is "rendered more credible by lesser revelation."[38] In other words, knowing the beliefs of others supports one's own convictions. Because there is room for normativity, on Wach's account particularization does not threaten the truth of general revelation, nor does it threaten the higher ranking of Christianity.

31. Wach, *Types of Religious Experience*, dedication page.

32. Kitagawa, introduction to Wach, *Comparative Study of Religion*, xliv.

33. Ibid.

34. Wach, *Comparative Study of Religion*, 16.

35. Ibid., 20. Wach's criticism of Hocking's idea of a world faith certainly parallels his view of Radhakrishnan's philosophy.

36. Joachim Wach, "General Revelation and the Religions of the World," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 22, no. 2 (April 1954): 83.

37. Ibid., 84.

38. Ibid., 87, emphasis in original.

Wach notes a resurgence in recent years (the middle of the twentieth century) of normative interest among scholars, of discussion of Christianity in conversation with world religions, and of a viewpoint that is unabashedly Christian.[39] Wach writes: "What we are advocating here is not some sort of syncretism nor are we relativists. Our allegiance is to Christ. . . . But we feel that in the physical and spiritual struggle which is going on in the world today, we simply cannot . . . deny that general revelation of God includes also the other faiths."[40] The logic that increased interest verifies and authorizes a particular perspective (Christian) seems rather shaky, to say the least, and the logic that political situations demand a view of general revelation is also questionable, but we are given here an insight into the perception of the historical and religious zeitgeist driving Wach's thought. This quote seems to support Radhakrishnan, at least in spirit, but while it does concede that other faiths are part of general revelation, nevertheless, particular revelations are not granted the status of Christianity, which retains the characterization as most genuine and closest to the truth of general revelation. If the reader will permit a tenuous comparison, Wach is presenting a sort of henotheism of religions because he is unable, given his Liberal Protestant leanings, to propose a pure monotheism of religions, and yet he is adamantly against any sort of (perhaps, "Indian"?) polytheistic take on world religions. Wach here denies both a fusion of religions and the assertion that all religions have an equal hold on truth, both of which possibilities he accuses Radhakrishnan of holding.

Wach frequently spoke as a Christian in his work, and he felt this to be unavoidable and important for his scholarship. Critics have also accused Otto, Wach's mentor, of speaking about religion from the perspective of a Christian.[41] In addition, Wach's Christianity involved a deep respect for missionary work.[42] Radhakrishnan makes an appearance in *Understanding and Believing* where he is said to have praised modern Christianity for showing "maturation" by dispensing with the "missionary attitude." According to Wach, the options for those who wish to rebut the judgment are grim, but he wants to all the same.[43] Wach mentions autobiographically that he had once been critical of religion and "looked elsewhere," but he became convinced of Jesus Christ as lord and savior.[44] He might therefore have been more insistent on Christianity, especially in his interaction with Radhakrishnan, because of this "return to

39. Ibid., 85.
40. Ibid., 91.
41. Balagangadhara, *"The Heathen in His Blindness . . . ,"* 197.
42. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 121.
43. Ibid., 116.
44. Ibid., 144.

faith" and a felt need to uphold and protect that decision above all other possible options. This being so, Wach's writings on Radhakrishnan can indeed be read as those of a Christian responding to the thoughts of a Hindu.

Wach is critical of Hinduism from his European viewpoint, as he is well aware, and this impinges upon his engagement with his Hindu interlocutor. In his class notes for May 15, 1950, Wach first notes that "many Hindus recognize abuses in the religion."[45] He cites the confession of Radhakrishnan that there are "past shortcomings of Hinduism with regard to social act and amelioration."[46] This example provides Wach with a way of suggesting that one can indeed make normative judgments about religions, but it also tacitly exculpates Christianity and thus sets Wach's religion in the superior position.

The Radhakrishnan about whom Wach writes is not merely a relativist to be denounced but also a statesman. In the Wach archives can be found the second part of a *New York Times* article dated April 7, 1952, on the topic of Indian politics that includes a photo of Radhakrishnan and makes a brief mention of his discussions with Stalin.[47] In the article, Radhakrishnan emerges as a mediating figure between the capitalist West and Soviet Russia. Wach's copious clippings on Indian politics during his preparations for the 1952 Barrows Lectures in India (one of which was given at a YMCA) may have prompted him to contextualize Radhakrishnan in his role as an ambassador, as a sort of spokesman for India, and a religious ambassador for Hinduism.[48]

Wach's reading of Radhakrishnan places the latter firmly in his own Indian and Hindu milieu, as is evident from some of Wach's notes for a course given at the University of Chicago, dated May 1, 1950, in which Wach portrays "Radhakrishna [*sic*]" as follows: "amb. to Moscow . . . reform Hinduism but retain essence, caste . . . blends tradit and W. learning . . . continuing revelation . . . modernist."[49] Tellingly, the first description of Radhakrishnan is in his political capacity, at that time, as ambassador to Moscow. Also, Radhakrishnan is described as an upholder of "continuing revelation." This means that he believes in the ongoing ability of humans to experience revelation—that it did not end with Christ—which coincides with his belief in the ultimate unity of religions. In addition, it is evident that Wach understands Radhakrishnan through the typologies of "reformer" and "modernist," as previously developed

45. Joachim Wach, Hinduism Class Notes, for HR 302 5/15/1950, box 4, folder 5, Joachim Wach Papers, University of Chicago Library.

46. Wach, *Comparative Study of Religion*, 36.

47. Box 4, folder 3, second item, Joachim Wach Papers.

48. Thanks to Professor Steven Wasserstrom for informing me that the context of the clippings was Wach's preparation for the Barrows Lectures.

49. Joachim Wach, Hinduism Class Notes, for HR 302 5/1/1950, box 4, folder 5, Joachim Wach Papers.

in his *Sociology of Religion*. As a "reformer," in Wach's typology, Radhakrishnan advocates the reinstatement of a primitive, pristine state, both politically and spiritually, and the establishment of a form of brotherhood.[50] Radhakrishnan was a "modernist" in the sense that, according to Wach's typology, he had progressive ideas, was a member of the intelligentsia, and wished to integrate rationalism while abandoning practices held in disdain.[51] For Wach, then, Radhakrishnan speaks as a religious figure, a possible object of his analysis, and not entirely relativistic in his own thoughts on religion.

Radhakrishnan responds to Wach in the same volume in which Wach's antirelativist critique of him first appears. Whereas Christianity is not the centerpiece of Wach's essay on Radhakrishnan, it is the primary subject of Radhakrishnan's response. To the question "What do you think of Christ?" Radhakrishnan responds favorably, albeit in his own terms as if the question were "What do you think of Jesus?"[52] He distinguishes between a historical Jesus and an ideologically infused "Christ" and finds a place for Jesus and Christianity in what he considers to be the human quest for truth.

To Wach's assertion that to give up the missionary task would deny Christ, Radhakrishnan, somewhat condescendingly and ironically, praises Wach's "sincerity" and his willingness to argue that Buddha and Muhammad are also universal options, but he seems to be aware that his own Hindu standpoint is therefore not made universal and argues that these "universal" religions with their tendency toward proselytization actually lead away from truth. As he writes, "I have a vague fear that much of modern apologetics, which professes to combat atheism only serves to support it. Many of us do not seem to defend faith in God, but are concerned to defend our ideas of God."[53] As Radhakrishnan sees it, Wach's theology is divisive in a way that lends credence to antireligious thought, and rather than promoting human religious knowledge merely bolsters his own Christian interpretation of religious knowledge.

Much of Radhakrishnan's response paints Wach as a fanatic. Radhakrishnan counters Wach's charges by arguing that people feel religious truth to be absolutely valid, but that they experience religion in historical contexts, and thus it need not be valid for all. Radhakrishnan writes that "the absoluteness of truth implies the relativity of all formulations of it."[54] To unpack this, Radhakrishnan is arguing that if truth is to be considered absolute, and formulations to be

50. Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 139.

51. Ibid., 235–36.

52. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Reply to Critics," in *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor, 1952), 807.

53. Ibid., 809.

54. Ibid., 811.

conditional, then all formulations are true relative to the absolute and to each other. It may be admitted that there are variations and divergences—Radhakrishnan does concede the point to Wach that religions are not inherently inculpable—but there is no means of judging how close to or far from the absolute truth a religion is. To claim otherwise, Radhakrishnan implies, would not just be nonrelativist, it would be fanatical.

Radhakrishnan contends that sharing among religions can lead to a more perfect union of religions and an understanding of absolute truth. In contrast to Wach's characterization of Radhakrishnan's project as entailing "mechanical addition or a world faith on a syncretic basis," Radhakrishnan responds, "we are asking for the conscious development of a historical process which is not unfamiliar to Christian thought, which has profited greatly from the valuable insights of other faiths."[55] Thus not only does Radhakrishnan suggest that the project he envisions is more nuanced as well as historically and humanistically (and spiritually) based, but also he points out that Christianity itself is not immune to such evolution to which end he cites numerous examples of Christianity's indebtedness to other religions. The Hindu comparative religion scholar accuses the Christian historian of religion of neglecting to be mindful of historicity in his conception of his own religion.

The figure of Radhakrishnan that Wach establishes as his interlocutor is not entirely a straw man. Indicative of the philosophical use to which Radhakrishnan wants to put comparative religions, he defines it as "one of the chief instruments by which the historic consciousness of the spiritual growth of mankind can be gained."[56] The general introduction to Radhakrishnan and Moore's *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* suggests that there is a "synthetic tradition" in Indian philosophy that has bred intellectual and religious tolerance in India throughout its history.[57] The text suggests that political and religious conflict is antithetical to this tendency, and "not outgrowths of the Indian mind," which rather tends toward unification.[58] The suggestion here is that the fractionalization of India along political and religious lines must be European in origin. Applied to the discussion of relativism, the implication is that hierarchicalization of religions is an imperial Western endeavor, and that it is in need of correction from a relativistic, egalitarian, Eastern perspective.

While European scholars felt the need to evaluate and reconcile the many new facts that came in from their spreading imperial world, Radhakrishnan's

55. Ibid., 812.

56. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1933), 39.

57. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, eds., *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), xxvii–xxviii.

58. Ibid., xxviii.

advocacy of unification stemmed from a sense that the world is shrinking. He said as much in an address to the Indian branch of the Union for the Study of Great Religions.[59] A shrinking world implies commonality of humanity: "With regard to religions the question is not of truth or falsehood, but of life or death."[60] Here, Radhakrishnan argues against validity, and the normativity it often implies, as the methodological basis of the study of religion in order to create a level playing field between European and non-European religions and scholars. Instead, Radhakrishnan implicitly proposes that common human experience be the central focus of the study of religion.

Radhakrishnan is not quite the syncretist Wach makes him out to be. Radhakrishnan supports mutual understanding between religions of the world.[61] Rather than a "fusion," he favors a "fellowship" of religions. On his account there can be cross-fertilization of ideas, but the religions might retain their individuality, yet he does suggest that there is something universally shared by all religions: "The unchanging substance of religion is the evolution of man's consciousness. The traditions help to take us to the truth above all traditions and of which the traditions are imperfect, halting expressions."[62] It seems here that Radhakrishnan might be in agreement with Wach in terms of the varied religions actually being susceptible to evaluation based on their interpretation of the ultimate. Yet Radhakrishnan stops short of averring that different religions have different truth values relative to the ultimate. The ultimate truth of religion is a teleological postulate for him, and not a veritable and empirical given as it is in Wach's heavily Christianized later work.

Still, Radhakrishnan's perspective is indeed influenced by his Hindu philosophical background, and it is a semisyncretistic take on Hinduism that he has secularized and formulated in terms of a philosophical standpoint that he does not (explicitly) promote above any other perspective. Also, it is likely that his call for "fellowship" is in response to the weighty issue of tense interreligious relations in the nascent Indian nation. Radhakrishnan is not just a philosopher, and thus there is also a strong pragmatic and political strain in his work.[63] He is trying to make some space for the Hindu voice to be heard internationally, and if he is pushing forcefully against Christianity in his response to

59. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Union for the Study of Great Religions, India Branch Inaugural Address, 29/05/55," in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, vice president, *Occasional Speeches and Writings*, First Series, 10/52–01/56, Publication Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1956.

60. Quoted in Wach, "Radhakrishnan and Comparative Study," 450.

61. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "Confessions," in *Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, 72–73.

62. Ibid., 75–77.

63. Paul Arthur Schilpp, comments, in *The Radhakrishnan Number: A Souvenir Volume of Appreciation* (Madras: Vyasa, 1962), 48.

Wach, that is because he likely felt that Christianity on the world stage overshadows Hinduism so much that it needs a powerful shove to remove its encumbering umbra and place it on a plane as relative to "true religion" as are all the other religions. Wach imagines Radhakrishnan to be anti-Christian, which the latter denies. Instead, Radhakrishnan is simply not Christian but Hindu, and this particular identity puts him at odds with a Christocentric religious landscape for the study of religion implied and encouraged by Wach.

Kitagawa suggests that Wach's article on Radhakrishnan is the only one in which Wach writes "concerning the claims of non-Christian religions."[64] Certainly Wach does not ignore non-Christian religions in his work, but perhaps Kitagawa's word "concerning" means something more like "critiquing" here, and the claims are specifically normative claims to a certain veracity. Kitagawa's remark points to the fact that Wach is not addressing Radhakrishnan as a fellow philosopher or scholar of religion, but as a religious figure. Thus we might not read this article so much as a philosophical piece but as an interreligious dialogue, and the inequalities present in that discourse are open to our critique.

In light of Kitagawa's comment and Wach's understanding of Radhakrishnan as a Hindu and a statesman as mentioned previously, the philosophical level at which the discourse takes place recedes, and its nature as an interreligious dialogue is foregrounded. It is not just relativism, but more precisely the relative power of both men's backgrounds that are at stake. Wach's understanding of Radhakrishnan not only locates the latter in a different religious and philosophical milieu but in so doing also removes him from Wach's inner circle of European, German philosophical debate. While it is the case that Wach begins his essay on Radhakrishnan by calling him a scholar of comparative religion,[65] Radhakrishnan's comparativist approach is relative only on one level, while on another level it could be read as promoting the Hindu cause. As Wach casts the discussion, Radhakrishnan is the same sort of scholar as Wach himself, but an entirely different sort of man. Thus, while Wach can engage Radhakrishnan as a scholar, the latter's adherence to relativism is undermined in the exchange by the interreligious undercurrent that in Wach's hands is implicitly imperial. Wach relocates Radhakrishnan from the philosophical level to a partisan, religious, and political position that reduces his authority within philosophical discourse. Wach's support of his own subjectivity and normativity builds a wall behind which his own partisanship is protected as permissible and his Christianity remains absolutely valid. As long as the exchange is an interreligious

64. Kitagawa, introduction to *Comparative Study of Religions*, xlii.

65. Wach, "Radhakrishnan and Comparative Study," 445.

dialogue, the sides cannot be equal; otherwise Wach must concede to Radhakrishnan the merits of relativism.

While Wach denounces wholesale relativism to promote his own Christianity, he does not wish to silence interreligious dialogue. Kitagawa, in his introduction to *The Comparative Study of Religions*, writes of Wach's "irenic effort." According to this oft-cited laudatory attribution, Wach's systematic work was intended to allow communication especially between people of the same discipline but of different faiths, such as was the case with himself and Radhakrishnan.[66] Kitagawa writes, however, that Wach's "intellectual principle was that the universal and the particular must be correlated, yet by temperament, Wach tended to view the particular from the standpoint of the universal."[67] Put another way, the hermeneutic circle that Wach employed in his interpretations was slightly off balance. For Wach, the universal is Christian in nature and incontrovertibly valid, and it is from that perspective that he interprets and engages with the particular—in this case Radhakrishnan's thought and Hindu background. After all, Kitagawa calls the irenic in Wach's work only an effort, but he cannot and does not call it a successful endeavor. It is more applicable to his earlier work than the later material under discussion. Also, the term "irenic" is most often used in the sense of a particular accepting and peaceful attitude toward varieties of Christianity and is thus inherently biased. It is closer to a Liberal Christian ideal of tolerance, a mere endurance of difference with the presumption of correctness, than any robust conception of relativism.[68] We need not take this "irenic effort" ascribed to Wach as synonymous with relativism. Instead, Wach's Christianity, antirelativist stance and his specific employment of the hermeneutic circle in his method of study ironically, and not irenically, allow him to hold onto his particular sense of the universal while critiquing Radhakrishnan's own particular perspective.

Kitagawa's apologetic and lenient characterization of Wach's dealings with Radhakrishnan and his supposed irenic effort suggests significant problems with an assessment of Wach's legacy that is mediated through Kitagawa. Again, rather apologetically, in response to Wach's question "Why not in the Spirit of Christ?" Kitagawa avers that the ideal is a spirit of tolerance within a "practical methodological framework," not any one religion's lenses.[69] Were that truly

66. Kitagawa, introduction to *Comparative Study of Religions*, xl.

67. Ibid.

68. Tolerance as a topic of scholastic investigation, and as differentiated from relativism, has been studied in depth by many and would be another project in itself. In contemplating pursuing the matter in this project (which avenue I decided not to take), I found useful Wendy Brown's book *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), esp. chap. 2.

69. Kitagawa, introduction to *Comparative Study of Religions*, xliii.

Wach's stance, why would he be so insistent on using the example of Christ? Kitagawa seems to emphasize unduly the "spirit" part of the quote in his reading. And did not this question significantly bother Wach during this period of his career? Furthermore, Wach's take on tolerance as a Christian value differs widely from the facile "bourgeois virtue" characterized by indifference. Wach's conception of tolerance still upholds the value of missionary work.[70] It seems to me that this, along with some of the preceding comments, reveals that Kitagawa was reworking and making more palatable the later Wach in order to sustain his legacy. Kitagawa was himself critical, but his critiques are so subtle as to be nearly nonexistent.[71] If, in deference to his mentor, Kitagawa did not go far enough in his critique in deference to his mentor, we today can and ought.

In order to appreciate what is it stake in the debate between Wach and Radhakrishnan on relativism, it is helpful to identify just what variety of relativism Wach attacks and Radhakrishnan advocates. While the application of more recent classificatory schemes (and there are quite a few) might be regarded as anachronistic, Melford Spiro's rubric is useful for understanding this half-century-old debate between Wach and Radhakrishnan in that it takes into account the history of relativism in cultural anthropology.[72] Specifically, the type of relativism under debate in Wach and Radhakrishnan's exchange appears to be the normative relativism of Boas and company founded on the moderate descriptive relativism that was prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The idea that, given the constructed nature of observed thoughts and behaviors and the variability of the contexts, it is to be concluded that what is observed is relative to the contexts, is loosely what Spiro would call "descriptive relativism."[73] With greater variation in context and with varied emphasis on the role of determinism in informing the relation between the context and what is observed, scholars have generated three varieties of descriptive relativism: weak, moderate, and strong.[74] Normative relativism, however, takes descriptive relativism one step further, suggesting that, given the constructed nature of any cultural, social, or religious object of study, there is no way to make normative statements

70. Wach, *Understanding and Believing*, 116.

71. A copy of the table of contents for the Schlipp volume on Radhakrishnan, in which are printed both Wach's piece and Radhakrishnan's response, has been filed in the "Reviews" section of the Wach archives. I had rashly concluded that this might be indicative of Kitagawa's consideration of Radhakrishnan's response as a "review." That conclusion, however, is too tenuous to be other than a footnote. The placement there could just be a mistake. Reviews, box 8, folder 9, Joachim Wach Papers.

72. Melford Spiro, "Cultural Relativism and the Future of Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 1, no. 3 (August 1986): 259–86.

73. Ibid., 259.

74. Ibid., 259–60.

about them from the vantage of another such construction.[75] Normative relativity was designed to protect against the questions and issues of racism that had crept into and threatened the field of anthropology.[76] Boasian normative relativism based on moderate relativism invoked the universality of a "'psychic unity'" in order to elevate third world societies to a level of equal status.[77] Unlike the universal of religious experience in Wach, this notion is an egalitarian "psychic unity" quite similar to the religious telos imagined by Radhakrishnan. The basis of this position is moderate descriptive relativism, which admits of both the relativity of the particular and the universality of humanity.

Yet the strange union of universality and relativity in moderate descriptive relativism does not therefore necessitate equality of value. Normative relativism is not necessitated by descriptive relativism. This is a critical point. One can conclude, as Radhakrishnan does, that universal religious truth is a latent potentiality beyond the vicissitudes of any and all relative positions. Or one can conclude, as Wach does, that there is one universal truth achieved in Christianity, and many (other) relative attempts to attain the same. Both are possible from the standpoint of descriptive relativism. But if one views the universal from the standpoint of various equal particulars, one is driven to accept normative relativism, as did the Boasians and Radhakrishnan. Wach, however, viewed the particular from the standpoint of the universal, privileging the universal and making normative assessments from that vantage point. Wach is against normative relativism, and Radhakrishnan is in favor of it, while both are moderate descriptive relativists. The "relativism" at issue in their discussion is the former, and neither opposes the latter.

Wach's project was to try to maintain a descriptive relativist stance while eschewing normative relativism, but even if normative relativism is not necessitated by descriptive relativism, an important question to ask is whether Wach's disavowal of normative relativism in turn hinged upon a significant weakening of the descriptive relativist position. I think that in and of themselves, the two modes can coexist just fine if done with proper caution. The problem for Wach is that he was not shy about the normative project he wanted to engage in, and felt that his normative project was leading toward the realization of a Christian telos that he thought already properly described ultimate religious experience. If the normative project is to describe the landscape of world religions such that Christianity is the ultimate truth and can and should be the ultimate truth regardless of context, then Wach's moderate descriptive relativism assumes the

75. Ibid., 260.
76. Ibid., 264–65.
77. Ibid., 265.

(negatively connoted) relativity of the particular and the (ideal) universality of the Christian, and this I think complicates his pretense to descriptive relativity in his scholarship. Put more simply, while it is the case that just because things are relative does not mean that some are not better than others, if it is assumed that one is better than all others, and that is the general by which the particular is perceived, it assumes the presence of an underlying reality that is not relative. If that underlying reality is the essence of religion, and what research proposes to seek, then such scholarship begs the question.

Rather than turn moderate relativism into an ontology that also involves strict normative relativism as does Radhakrishnan, and rather than awkwardly combining descriptive relativism with a strong normative project that endangers it, as does Wach, one can refine out of the Boasian argument an implicit premise underlying both moderate and normative relativisms that is merely methodological. Radhakrishnan himself seems to foreshadow this more pragmatic spin on relativism. In his response to Wach, Radhakrishnan cites the dangers of not holding such a view. He writes that "the claim to the possession of a unique revealed truth, which declines to be classified as one among many, is ruinous for men."[78] Violence, hatred, and other atrocities extend from such fanaticism. Relativism, for Radhakrishnan, can have practical, worldly consequences. Wach, by contrast, dismisses relativism precisely in favor of a different sort of approach to the study of religion. On this view, relativism promotes peace, and antirelativism promotes truth. But methodological relativism, however imperfectly, springs from and confines itself to the academy, and an academy that eschews the search for, or at least brackets the question of, religious truth; this relativism's scope is only how the scholar should conduct oneself, at least at the outset of study, in relation to the object of study and interlocutors.

Gananath Obeyesekere makes this important distinction between philosophical and methodological relativism. He calls philosophical relativism the "thesis or credo of relativism as opposed to the fact of relativism."[79] Relativism as a conceptual entity is defined as the theoretical side of the relativistic coin, present in the mind of the observers. Also, on his account, it is only for philosophical relativists that moral statements cannot be made. Philosophical relativism is to be distinguished from the assertion of ontological relativism, which posits the very fact that all is relative to cultural construction. Both are to be distinguished from the methodological relativism Obeyesekere ardently

78. Radhakrishnan, "Reply to Critics," 810.

79. Gananath Obeyesekere, "Methodological and Philosophical Relativism," *Man*, n.s., vol. 1, no. 3 (September 1966): 371.

endorses,[80] which "asserts that it may be useful for the social sciences to view morals and customs *as if* they were relative for certain scientific purposes."[81] The "as if" model of relativism does not care for the truth or falsity of relativity and in fact does not prevent the making of normative and universalistic claims, but merely suggests that if we wish to avoid blinding value judgments and ethnocentricities, then adopting methodological relativism is beneficial.

It is a similar argument for the scholastic usefulness of relativism that I think Clifford Geertz favors. In his essay "Anti Anti-Relativism," Geertz argues against those who want to eliminate relativism but does not wholly commit himself to a relativist standpoint.[82] He writes that relativism "serves these days largely as a specter to scare us away from certain ways of thinking and toward others."[83] For Geertz, relativism stems from a debate about how to deal with the wealth of information coming in from ethnographic research. Against those who might argue that being a staunch relativist is not relative, he argues that relativism is the "expression of a perception, caused by thinking a lot about Zunis and Dahomeys, that, the world being so full of a number of things, rushing to judgment is more than a mistake, it's a crime."[84] Relativism here is not describing the fact of divergence between cultures, but a methodological position intended to ensure the quality of research and to prevent hasty, unreasoned condemnations. The antirelativists he attacks are concerned not only that, in a relativistic world, no universal claims can be made (whether they be cultural universals, cognitive universals, or moral universals), but also that what we ought to be concerned with, "as though our very souls depended on it, is a kind of spiritual entropy, a heat death of the mind, in which everything is as significant, thus as insignificant as everything else."[85] In other words, antirelativists, like Wach, want to reserve the right to make normative judgments and create hierarchies, and thus to insist upon their view (Christian, Hindu, Conservative, etc.) as the salve for what they see as an ailing, confused, decentered world. Yet their agenda is not merely scholastic, and their target is other than methodological relativism.

Yet Geertz himself is not immune to value judgments. In a book comprising an oft-humorous collection of notes, Marshall Sahlins has one note entitled "Anti-Relativism[3]"; because there are no footnotes, I take this superscript

80. Ibid., 373.

81. Ibid., 371, emphasis in original.

82. Clifford Geertz, "Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-Relativism," *American Anthropologist*, n.s., vol. 86, no. 2 (June 1984): 264.

83. Ibid., 263.

84. Ibid., 265.

85. Ibid.

numeral 3 to mean "cubed," which I read as being in direct response to Geertz's article mentioned earlier. As Sahlins concludes the blurb describing a methodological understanding of cultural relativism, "Relativity is the provisional suspension of one's own judgments in order to situate the practices at issue in the historical and cultural order that made them possible. It is in no other way a matter of advocacy."[86] Indeed, Geertz's rhetoric, like Radhakrishnan's as well, implies that not being relativist is a dangerous crime. Is that not itself somehow normative? Though, one might equally point out that Sahlins is "advocating" a certain methodology, too.

In an article on cultural relativism published in the *Nation*, Micaela di Leonardo points out the explicit antirelativist discourse of the New (Christian) Right. Their attacks on cultural relativism attempt to open up a space in which to advocate moral reform and the use of Christian principles in government.[87] I contend that their argument for the necessity of normativity for the proper functioning of morality and their view of relativism as a threat to moral order are different only in scope from those arguments made by Wach with respect to the study of religion. In addition, di Leonardo advocates a form of methodological relativism.[88] She admits, correctly, that partiality is always in play, but for her that is just as much a carte blanche for the New Right to legislate its Christian values as it is carte blanche for Wach to be a Christian missionary within the comparative study of religion. It might be contended that partiality's being problematic plays on the assumption of an existent universal truth, whereas methodological relativism, supposedly, brackets that question for the sake of scholastic enterprise. Yet normative academic discourse is itself governed by presuppositions.

It is important to note at this juncture that the contributions of Geertz, Sahlins, and di Leonardo (and admittedly myself at points in the present essay) all rest on a secular ideal of scholarship, and secularism itself has something of a religious inviolability to it. Secular calls for moral relativism, and even methodological relativism, are not without their own air of ethical normativity and sacred reverence. Derrida points this out nicely:

> I try in fact to approach texts not without respect but without religious presuppositions, in the dogmatic sense of religious. Still, in the respect to which I yield there is something that bows before a sacredness, if not before something religious. The text of the other

86. Marshall Sahlins, *Waiting for Foucault, Still* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002), 46.

87. Micaela di Leonardo, "Patterns of Culture Wars," *Nation*, April 8, 1996, 25–29. Thanks to Professor Lynn Thomas, Pomona College, for giving me this article many years ago.

88. Ibid., 29.

> must be read and interrogated without mercy but therefore respected, and initially in the body of its actual words. I can interrogate, contradict, attack, or simply deconstruct a logic of the text that came before me, and is before me, but I cannot and must not change it.[89]

The same could be said for any religious thought or belief of others as well. Perhaps the sense of a problem herein stems from the assumption that there must be a clean and pure escape route, out of confusion into knowledge, from such a conundrum.

Contra Derrida, some of us desperately want to be able to change things; some scholars want to take an active role in political issues and to dispute religious notions that incite or involve violence or pose impediments to peace. This is different, I think, than what Wach was trying to do: it is one thing to, say, speak against mistreatment of women and (carefully) use the study of religion to that end; it is quite another to suggest that establishing Christianity on the top of a hierarchy of religions and separating the husk of religiosity from the chaff of relative perversions are essential tasks for the study of religion. Wendy Doniger usefully discusses these issues in the introduction to her book *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* with the example of suttee, but I think her conclusion of the section is most useful:

> *Moral* relativism would ultimately prevent us from making essential decisions about the one way in which we can act in a given situation. . . . *ontological* relativism, relativism about ideas, does not necessarily involve a yes/no decision about any particular action; it merely allows us to consider all the options. Moral relativism does expose us to serious dangers, but these dangers are not necessarily attached to ontological relativism. Ontological relativism is neither cowardly nor inconsistent with the pragmatist position: when forced to make a decision, one does so, but when not forced to do so (and one should not be forced to do so), one does not.[90]

From this I extrapolate a step further to suggest that the question posed the modern scholar by relativism is not a yes/no question. It is precisely an assumption that a yes/no answer is posed, that there is a simple dichotomy[91] between relativism and antirelativism, that leads many thinkers—from Wach and

89. Jacques Derrida, "Others Are Secret Because They Are Other," in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 141–42.

90. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 20–21, emphasis in original.

91. Cf. chapter 14 in this volume, p. 307.

Radhakrishnan to di Leonardo and the conservatives to Geertz and Sahlins—to give answers that fall closer to one side or the other, however nuanced their responses may be. Especially in Wach and Geertz, the answer seems to be yes/no at the same time with little help as to how that could be done. In Obeyesekere's terms, the debate is caught up in a philosophical mode of relativism. Instead, the important methodological questions, which are much more interesting in spite of the grainier way in which they depict the intellectual world, ask *when and how to take or not to take a moral or methodological relativist approach*.

This is not merely a methodological question but a historical question. As argued here, Wach understood historically why Radhakrishnan wanted to be a relativist, and I think his attempts to evade the relativism/antirelativism problem echo the questions that I think might more profitably be asked. But in opposing relativism, Wach wanted to make room for a proposed transhistorical truth. He understood his position as being in a historical context (the felt need for normativity) but did not himself understand the position within a critical historical framework. To return to the "as if" in Obeyesekere's description of methodological relativism, it is not that different from the "as if" in Kant's second categorical imperative. In fact, we might say that the categorical imperative of such methodological ethics as Obeyesekere proposed for the human sciences is: conduct research as if the relativity you apply to others could be a universal rule, thus applying to oneself as well. In a similar vein, the interchange between Wach and Radhakrishnan, for me, does not suggest some need for more moral relativism so much as it speaks to a need within the study of religion for a healthy sense of self-doubt.

Doubt, I think, is implied in J. Z. Smith's famous call for "self-consciousness."[92] It is not so much Wach's argument against moral relativism per se that I find problematic as much as it is the evangelical worldview for the sake of which he makes the argument and his insistence that this is a valuable aspect of the study of religion. Again, relativism need not present an all-or-nothing proposition. Instead of preventing useful critique, instead of preventing scholars from ever uttering words that condemn certain practices, I contend that a healthy sense of self-doubt, or at least lack of self-righteousness, in scholarship is an important cushion between the Scylla of Wach and the Charybdis of speechlessness. In fact, self-doubt does not detract from a supposed scientificity of the study of religion but rather adds to it by prompting more questions. Doubt, for me, is freedom, and with it a study of religion might critique without evangelizing and think without parroting a regnant scholastic tradition of secularism that binds it.

92. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

It is thus, anyhow, that a discipline is able even to begin to critique, much less divest itself of, the problems of its forefathers—to "un-inherit" Wach.[93]

The lesson for religious studies in Wach's debate with Radhakrishnan is primarily of methodological import. Maintaining the existence of a universal absolute truth and attempting to categorize religions into an evaluative hierarchy is a dangerous prospect because it opens up a space in which power dynamics operate with great virulence. Without a dose of methodological relativism, religious studies runs the risk of devolving into an interreligious dialogue at a superficial level composed of varying parties vying for supremacy. In this take-a-Hindu-to-lunch-(and ask him what he thinks of Christ)-methodology there is the risk of undue self-involvement in the scholastic enterprise. Some is unavoidable, but when an assumed a priori understanding of religious experience, with its attendant normative claims and universalist implications, becomes the lens through which other religions are viewed, the balance between self and the object of study is upset; the hermeneutic circle is not only vicious but also lopsided. According to Charles Wood, it is Wach's conception of hermeneutics, and particularly his conception of the hermeneutic circle, that causes problems: "Such of Wach's aims as objectivity, critical freedom, and keen respect for the particular were undermined by his account of the nature and conditions of understanding."[94] The opposite approach need not be wholesale relativism, nor need it be an awkward compromise position. It is indeed possible to be one type of relativist while writing a diatribe against another, and it is certainly possible to be different kinds of relativists at different times in different ways to different degrees. There is still room for making critical claims about aspects of other religions, but not as based on a preconceived notion of an ultimate, undoubted truth as necessitated by Wach's employment of hermeneutics in the study of religion. I would like to think that a healthy sense of self-doubt would be productive to this end, but I would welcome criticism on this. While many of these issues raised here are still pertinent and problematic in the study of religion, and I do not claim to have offered anything near a total panacea, many of the claims I have made are, I think, at very least implicit in the modern study of religion, and there is little risk of the discipline seriously rehashing many of Wach's arguments. In a way, Wach's Christian theological turn during his time at the University of Chicago marks a sort of Frostian "road not taken" within the study of religion, but that is all the more reason not to erase it from the map.

93. "Un-inheriting . . . [is] a pathway of reflecting . . . that is not reducible to a ready-made binary of remembering/forgetting or embracing/abandoning." Ananda Abeysekara, *The Politics of Postsecular Religion: Mourning Secular Futures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2–3.

94. Wood, *Theory and Understanding*, 159.

# PART II

# Mircea Eliade

*Literature and Politics*

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# 5

# Eliade and Ionesco in the Post–World War II Years: Questions of Identity in Exile

*Matei Calinescu†*

## I

A fairly large number of Romanian intellectuals of diverse political persuasions, from the right to the left, became refugees in Paris immediately after the end of World War II (1945). Many of them had been members or sympathizers of the Romanian version of Fascism, represented by the Iron Guard. There were, however, among the newly displaced, quite a few liberal democrats, socialists, and even Communists who had joined the French Resistance during the war. The latter case is illustrated by the philosopher Mihai Şora, a former student of Mircea Eliade at the University of Bucharest and a doctoral student in Grenoble during the war, who became a member of the French Communist Party in 1945; in 1948 he went to Romania to see his parents and was prevented from returning to France, where his wife and children were expecting him; subsequently, they joined him in Romania.[1] Of the early Paris Romanian émigrés, three were to

1. Mihai Şora, born in 1916, had obtained a fellowship from the French Institute in Bucharest in 1938 (at the same time as the older Eugène Ionesco). He fled occupied Paris in 1940 and ended up in Grenoble, where he worked on a doctoral thesis on Pascal under the direction of the distinguished Pascal scholar Jacques Chevalier, and where he soon joined the French Resistance against the German occupation of the country. He returned to Paris in 1945, where he published a book, *Du dialogue intérieur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947). Forced to stay in Romania after 1948, he soon became disenchanted with Communism in power, as well as with its ideology, and for twenty years did not publish anything. He broke his silence in 1968, a year of hope and relaxation of censorship in Romania, and published several books before and after 1989, when the National-Communist dictatorship

achieve, through their writings, international recognition over the next decades. They were the playwright Eugène Ionesco (1909–94), the writer and historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907–86), and the philosopher and essayist E. M. (Emil) Cioran (1911–95). Well into their thirties in 1945, they all had a significant track record as writers in their native country. Eliade was nothing short of a celebrity in Romania, author of several highly successful novels, of numerous essays collected in books, and of hundreds of newspaper articles, and he was widely considered the intellectual "chief of the young generation." He had also been a charismatic professor at the University of Bucharest, fondly remembered by former students. Cioran was leaving behind five remarked and controversial volumes, among them a flamboyant nationalist manifesto, *The Transfiguration of Romania* (1936). Eugène Ionescu had only two volumes to his credit, the first a collection of youthful poems, the second, titled *Nu* (*No*), a book of literary criticism (or rather anti–literary criticism), which established his reputation as an enfant terrible of the Romanian literary scene; aside from these books, Ionescu had published widely in various periodicals of the time, essays, pages from his diary, fragments from projected but unfinished novels.

Unknown in France (with the exception of Eliade, who was respected in the rarefied circles of French Orientalists for his 1936 book on Yoga),[2] each of the three new émigrés was confronted with hard personal, political, cultural, and linguistic problems, ultimately revolving around the question of identity. Coming from a small, little-known, peripheral, backward East European country, which had attained full nationhood only in the nineteenth century and which encountered huge difficulties on the road to modernization, they found themselves in one of the centers—if not *the* center—of modern European cultural space. Paris, at the time, not only enjoyed an extraordinarily rich intellectual heritage but also continued to play, in spite of the French debacle in World War II, a major role "in the manufacture and diffusion of literary modernity."[3]

In 1945 and for years thereafter, the three Romanian exiles in Paris found themselves in a less than enviable situation. Of course they did not want to return to their country, which was now under increasingly obvious Soviet domination and was undergoing an apparently irreversible process of radical social change

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of N. Ceauşescu collapsed. After serving briefly as Romania's minister of education in 1990, he became one of the intellectual luminaries of the opposition to the corrupt regime of President Ion Iliescu, which based its power on the former secret police and second-ranking Communist apparatchiks who converted overnight to the ideals of an "original democracy." In 2006, Mihai Şora turned ninety; he is still active on the Romanian intellectual scene as a passionate defender of the ideals of civil society.

2. Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, essai sur les origines de la mystique indienne* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner; Bucharest: Fundaţia pentru literatură şi artă Regele Carol II, 1936).

3. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBeuvoise (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 334.

along the lines of the Stalinist model of socialism imposed by Russia. Sooner or later, they would have been ostracized as "bourgeois intellectuals" or "counter-revolutionary intellectuals" and probably thrown in prison there. In France, on the other hand, they were materially destitute, living precariously from one day to the next, facing all sorts of uncertainties. As for their public identity, they had, as we saw, a significant literary past and—with the exception of Ionesco—the added burden of a baleful political past, too. Cioran and Eliade had been ideologically close to the Iron Guard of Corneliu Codreanu, a mass nationalist movement, anti-Semitic and xenophobic, differing from other versions of European Fascism only in that it had a strong religious, Eastern Orthodox, component—a component that might explain, at least in part, the attraction it exerted on Eliade, as a young scholar of religion. But even at that time, Eliade was not so much interested in Eastern Orthodox theology as in the pre-Christian archaic peasant religions of the East, which had managed to survive under a variety of forms throughout the Christian era, particularly as a legacy of Byzantium in Eastern Europe and the Balkans—hence also Eliade's interest in folklore and in folk versions of ancient myth.

One way or the other, Eliade and Cioran had to deal with their problematic past. As for Ionesco, he had been an Anti-Fascist all along, but during the war, feeling himself in exile in his native country, feeling actually endangered there (due primarily to his profound political convictions but also, possibly, to his partially Jewish origin through his mother), he had struggled and managed to obtain a low-level appointment in the cultural services of the Romanian legation in Vichy. It had been a survival strategy for him, but after the war, his stint in Vichy, if more widely known, would have stigmatized him in the public eye and, more important, would have shown him, a lifelong antitotalitarian, in a completely false light. Hence his understandable discretion with regard to this episode in his life. Actually, during those years and in the immediate postwar period, Ionesco was close to the French left, particularly the Catholic left, as represented by Emmanuel Mounier and the journal *Esprit*.

Irrespective of the identity choices made by the three Romanian refugees in the postwar years, the fact of their later international recognition was bound to invite research into their past. Celebrity is not without its dangers. This was demonstrated by a relatively recent book by Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine.[4] I have discussed this book at some length elsewhere,[5] and I will limit myself here to just a few remarks. The author's thesis—which is in fact an indictment—can be easily summarized. Laignel-Lavastine posits that Cioran and Eliade were genuine

4. Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'oubli du fascisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).

5. Matei Calinescu, *Eugène Ionesco: Recherches identitaires* (Paris: Oxus, 2005), 81–90.

Fascists and "visceral" anti-Semites and remained so, in spite of all contrary appearances (Cioran, she maintains, actually tried to strike a philo-Semitic pose, but this did not change his real feelings toward Jews; Eliade simply glossed over his past Fascist engagements and hoped that they would be forgotten). As for Ionesco, who could not be accused of Fascist sympathies, Lavastine suggests that he became friends with his two former ideological enemies in an attempt to conclude with them a "pact of silence" of sorts, in order to conceal his own past association with Vichy (as if Cioran and Eliade might have denounced him). Laignel-Lavastine's massive study (more than 500 pages) is, if clearly biased, interesting and full of detailed references and quotations; but, unfortunately, as has been established in a number of reviews of her book (both in France and in Romania), the information it provides is seldom reliable. Also, I think that the broad scenario on which it is based is not convincing. The reason for the reconciliation of the three refugees in postwar Paris was, I believe, different from a "pact of silence": Cioran and Eliade, at least in private, at least in their relationship with Ionesco, regretted their past and recognized that they had been wrong. They may have expected from him, through his acceptance of them as friends, some kind of tacit, symbolic absolution, for *des raisons que la raison ne connaît pas*.

Another factor facilitated this reconciliation: as members of the same generation, Cioran and Eliade shared with Ionesco many common friends and common cultural references and, more important, a whole subtle atmosphere, that "tacit dimension" that marks, irrespective of temporary ideological choices, intellectuals belonging to the same age-group. On September 19, 1945, in a long letter to a Romanian correspondent, the professor of aesthetics at the University of Bucharest, Tudor Vianu, Ionesco mentioned, among others, Eliade and Cioran:

> I for one don't have to reproach myself of having been a Fascist. But almost all the others are to blame—except Mihail Sebastian who had kept a clear mind and was genuinely humane. It's so sad he has left us. [Sebastian had been run over by a military truck in Bucharest on May 9, 1945.] Cioran is here, an exile. He admits he has erred in his youth. I find it hard to forgive him, though. Mircea Eliade has also arrived or is to arrive one of these days: for him everything's lost, since Communism has won out. [Eliade had actually arrived in Paris three days before, on September 16, 1945.] He is really very guilty. But he, as well as Cioran . . . and so many others . . . are victims of the hateful departed, Nae Ionescu. If Nae Ionescu had not existed . . . today we would have a fine generation of leaders between 35 and 40 years of age. Because of him they all became Fascists. He created a stupid, horrifying, reactionary Romania. The second guiltiest is

> Eliade. At one time he was close to becoming a left-winger. That was fifteen years ago. . . . Eliade is responsible for having pulled after him part of his generation and all the young intelligentsia. How different everything would have been if these two [Nae Ionescu and Eliade] had been good masters. (my translation)

In the words that conclude the foregoing passage of Ionesco's letter, one can sense, however paradoxically or indirectly, the possibility of his reconciliation with his enemies: "I have always hated them: I fought against them; and they also hated me—but without them, my enemies, I feel lonely. I was cursed to hate them and to be linked to them: with whom could I continue the dialogue? I was marked with the same sign as they."[6]

Of the three early postwar Romanian exiles, I will leave aside the case of Cioran and focus on the contrasting cases of Eliade and Ionesco. While Eliade stuck to his Romanian identity, Ionesco, after two or three years of hesitation, decided to become a French writer, so much so that for a period he would have preferred his Romanian identity to be forgotten. Eliade remained a Romanian both as a writer of fiction (all of which he set in Romania and wrote in Romanian, to be translated into French, German, English, Italian, or other languages, without great success, I might add) and as a type of scholar in the mold of a nineteenth-century Romanian encyclopedic polymath like B. P. Haşdeu, whom he greatly admired and edited in 1937. (One should note, however, that Eliade wrote his scholarly work directly in French or, later on, occasionally, in English; and that the "Romanian" dimension of his scholarship remained invisible to most of his Western readers.) The history and implications of the two authors' identity choices are quite different, as one would expect. Let us look at them more closely.

## II

Mircea Eliade, whose political past has been the object of much debate since the early 1990s,[7] dealt with the question of public identity differently from both

6. See Eugène Ionesco, *Scrisori către Tudor Vianu*, vol. 2 (1936–1949) (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1994), 275 (the English translation is mine).

7. The debate about the by then largely forgotten political engagement of Eliade in the 1930s and its implications for the reception of his work was started by Norman Manea's courageous article "Happy Guilt: Mircea Eliade, Fascism, and the Unhappy Fate of Romania" in the *New Republic*, August 4, 1991, and pursued in Romania, France, Italy, and the English-speaking world. I have discussed some of the themes of the debate in my book in Romanian, *Despre Ioan P. Culianu şi Mircea Eliade: Amintiri, lecturi, reflecții [On Ioan P. Culianu and Mircea Eliade: Memories, Readings, Reflections*] (Iaşi: Polirom, 2002), and, earlier, in an article in English, "The 1927 Generation in Romania: Friendships and Ideological Choices (Mihail Sebastian, Mircea Eliade, Nae Ionescu, Eugène Ionesco, E. M. Cioran)," *East European Politics and Societies* 15 (Fall 2001): 649–78. For a balanced and informed account of this episode in Eliade's life, see Florin Turcanu, *Mircea Eliade, le prisonnier de l'histoire* (Paris: Editions de la découverte, 2003).

Ionesco and Cioran: he continued to see himself as a Romanian writer and scholar in exile, as a "wandering scholar," as living an "Exile's Odyssey."[8] (The second volume of his *Autobiography* is actually subtitled "Exile's Odyssey.") His growing reputation as a world authority in matters of religious history was derived from an abundance of specialized publications, together with others more accessible to a wider audience and translated into numerous languages (*The Myth of the Eternal Return, The Sacred and the Profane, Myth and Reality*, etc.); this made him feel secure enough in his old identity not to be tempted to reinvent himself, at least, as we shall see, not ethnically or culturally. In the first years of his exile, in Paris, where he arrived in 1945 from Portugal (he had been cultural attaché at the Romanian legation in Lisbon between 1941 and 1945), he experienced, however, aside from the hardships of a displaced person without any reliable source of income, certain inconveniences and worse, on account of his former wrongheaded allegiance to some of the ideological tenets of the Iron Guard, as expressed in a dozen or so newspaper articles published between 1937 and 1938 (but not included in any of his books). After the war, the periodicals in which he had published these articles were unavailable in Romanian public libraries, where the strict Communist censorship had relegated them to their "secret collections." The very obscurity of the country he came from was a protection of sorts.

Still, as he noted in the yet unpublished part of his diary, some fellow Romanians in Paris, alluding anonymously to his political past, went so far as to try to prevent him from lecturing on religion at the École pratique de hautes études, where Georges Dumézil and Henri-Charles Puech had invited him to teach. Thus, for instance, in 1946, swastikas were scratched on the posters announcing Eliade's seminar. Here is a journal entry, dated February 14, 1946, written on such an occasion:

> Today, Dumézil shows me the poster announcing my lectures. Two swastikas, in red, were drawn on its margins. I also learn that I have been denounced to Puech as a Nazi. I visit Puech in the evening; very forthcoming, he tells me that the Sorbonne is terrorized by gangsters, that measures must be taken, etc.—but that it would be better if I didn't give my course so as to avoid hostile demonstrations. He also tells me that, in a board meeting, they will try to find the source of this cabal, etc. What can I do? Ask the Legation to send a curriculum vitae for the last years? Disgust with the Romanians. Because this

8. See Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume 2, 1937–1960, Exile's Odyssey*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

> scheme is not due to [three crossed-out lines, unreadable], but to the envy provoked by my invitation to the Sorbonne. Since Iorga, no other Romanian has enjoyed this honor. It is for this that I cannot be forgiven by the Romanian failures [*rataţi*] in Paris, who have been "working" for 10–15 years to complete a dissertation or struggle to be invited to give a lecture. . . . At times I would like to change my citizenship, to become a Hungarian or a Bulgarian—only out of disgust with Romanianness [*românitate*].[9]

Another denunciation against him is mentioned on March 26, 1946, with the comment: "The same good-willing and patriotic fellow countrymen."

Such irritations with regard to public identity were short-lived in the case of Eliade. International recognition, the success of his books, and his appointment and brilliant career at the University of Chicago (1957–86) consolidated his identity as a scholar and philosopher of myth and religion, leaving his Romanian identity in a sort of public penumbra—so much so that many of his readers, and even many of his students, ignored his ethnic origin or considered it irrelevant (evidently, his popularity among the members of the American counterculture of the 1960s and the early 1970s, or among the representatives of the New Age, had nothing to do with it). But in his parallel Romanian fiction (from the major novel written in France in the early 1950s, *Noaptea de Sânziene*, translated into French as *Forêt interdite*[10] and into English as *The Forbidden Forest*,[11] to his stories of the fantastic of the 1960 and 1970s), as well as in his memoirs and his journal, Eliade's Romanian identity manifested itself fully and proudly. The Romanians who knew him personally (myself included), and with whom, unlike Cioran, he spoke naturally in Romanian, were always impressed by his keen interest in all things Romanian and by his wish to keep up with current news about what was happening in his lost country—lost, it seemed, forever, since Communism managed to appear irreversible to both its supporters and its enemies. For Eliade, Romania had entered what he called "posthistory," but that did not keep him from following the developments there as closely as possible—not through newspapers, which he did not read, on principle, but through human contacts with recent émigrés or visitors. For many years, particularly during the period of "mini-liberalization" of the regime in the mid-1960s and even after, writers from Communist Romania were

9. From a photocopy of Eliade's *Journal* preserved in the Special Collections of the Joseph Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago.

10. Mircea Eliade, *Forêt interdite*, trans. Alain Guillermou (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

11. Mircea Eliade, *The Forbidden Forest*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts and Mary Park Stevenson (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978).

allowed to participate in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, and they all wanted to see Eliade, who received them generously and found time to read their books (with occasionally enthusiastic reactions, such as to Stefan Bănulescu's novellas).[12]

Eliade's engagement with the Iron Guard, about which he never talked to visitors, had been both more serious and more self-deluded than one might think. Its published traces are, however, not numerous, and they stopped, as we saw, in 1938 (in part with the aid of the censorship introduced by the dictatorship of King Carol II, an opponent of the Legionary movement). That this engagement was both serious and self-deluded comes out from the personal diary (first published in Romanian in 1996) of Eliade's onetime close Jewish friend, Mihail Sebastian. Kept between 1935 and 1944, the journal records the progressive estrangement between Sebastian and Eliade because of Eliade's increasing intoxication with the ideology of Codreanu's movement. After a long discussion with Eliade, Sebastian notes in the entry for March 2, 1937, with lucidity and chagrin, his friend's new "passion" and at the same time his "naïveté":

> One day I may reread these lines and feel unable to believe that they summarize his [Mircea's] words. So it is well if I say again that I have done no more than record his very words—so that they aren't somehow forgotten. Perhaps one day things will have calmed down enough for me to read this page to Mircea and to see him blush with shame. Nor should I forget his explanation for joining the Guard with such passion: "I have always believed in the primacy of the spirit." He is neither a charlatan nor a madman. He's just naïve. But there are such catastrophic forms of naiveté.[13]

12. Here is a journal entry, dated February 23–24, 1972, which I quote from the French edition of Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal II, 1970–1978*, trans. C. Grigoresco (Paris: Gallimard, 1981):

> Stefan Banulesco et Marin Soresco, tous deux 'writers in residence,' sont arrivés hier, avec leurs femmes, de Iowa City. Ils sont nos invités au Quadrangle Club. Je les ai rencontrés pour la première fois à Rome, pendant l'été de 1968. Ils étaient pour moi les premiers écrivains roumains de la jeune génération dont je faisais la connaissance. Comme par hasard, ils étaient aussi les seuls dont j'avais lu les oeuvres. J'avais beaucoup aimé *Iarna barbatilor* ("L'hiver des hommes"), le recueil de nouvelles de Stefan Banulesco, de même que les poésies de Marin Soresco. . . . Impossible à résumer nos longues conversations: je les soumettais tous deux à un feu nourri de questions, sur mes amis et collègues restés au pays, sur la nouvelle génération d'écrivains, etc. . . . etc. . . . Miracle d'une culture qui s'entête à créer et à s'approfondir durant les rares moments de répit que lui consent l'Histoire" (57–58). One year later, mentioning the visit, also from Iowa, of the poet Cezar Baltag, he writes: "Je constate une fois de plus, non sans plaisir, que l'on peut survivre, à la fois comme homme et comme artiste, dans une société post-historique" (115).

13. The quotation is from Mihail Sebastian, *Journal, 1935–1944: The Fascist Years*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 114.

This moment represented what Eliade was to call a few years later, in the journal he kept in Portugal, his "Legionary climax." After the war he would speak of the "Legionary tragedy" and its traumatic effect on Romania; also, in a tough discussion with a highly critical Eugène Ionesco, he compared the Legionary movement—which had survived its founder's death in 1938[14] and had briefly come to power between September 1940 and January 1941—to a bloody "vampire." In a still-unpublished part of his diary, which I read in the Special Collections of the Joseph Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago, Eliade wrote on October 4, 1945:

> After the death of Codreanu and the other leaders, the Guard became a vampire [*strigoi*]. . . . As the victim of a violent death, the Guard turned into a vampire. It cannot rest, either in the grave or in history. With the blood of the Legionaries and of those killed by the Legionaries, the vampire has continued to "live." This must be brought to an end; that is, integrated. . . . Psychiatry cures asthenias and neuroses by helping the patient to integrate into his personality certain conflicts, traumas, obsessions, etc., which make his life a failure. We must proceed likewise, by integrating the traumas, the injuries, the mistakes, the crimes, the frenzies of the Guard,—and move on.

Eliade clearly disavowed the activities of the Iron Guard after the death of Codreanu, but he seemed to forget that the organization had been involved in terrorist actions before 1938: the assassination of Prime Minister I. G. Duca in 1933 and the murder of the dissident Mihail Stelescu in 1936 by ten fanatics who received, with the implicit approval of Codreanu, the honorific title of "Decemviri" within the movement; the killers of Duca had been honorifically proclaimed "Nicadori" (an acronym based on their names). While Eliade reports his reaction to Ionesco's reviling the Iron Guard, he does not record Ionesco's arguments or response. Significantly, he does not mention whether Ionesco had agreed with his views or not. The discussion must have been tumultuous, but it is clear that by the time it took place, Eliade had left the Legionary episode behind. Even from his *Portuguese Journal*, which has been belatedly published in Romania, it becomes clear that toward the end of the war Eliade had decided to commit himself exclusively to his work as a scholar of religion and myth, addressed from then on to the international community of scholars in a major language, namely, French. With regard to his relationship with Ionesco, it was by no means to be as smooth as it might appear. In the

14. Corneliu Codreanu (together with the "Nicadori" and the "Decemviri") had been executed in prison on the orders of King Carol II on November 30, 1938.

unpublished part of his journal, Eliade briefly noted other tense encounters, in 1945 and 1946, in which Ionesco most probably took him to task about his past. As late as the 1960s, Ionesco did not hide his strong disagreements with the former supporters of the Iron Guard, including Eliade. In the yet-unpublished journal entry for January 18, 1964, Eliade, at the time in Chicago, wrote:

> From a letter sent by V. Ierunca, I learn that Eugen Ionescu is again angry with me: he considers me (as in 1945) responsible for Auschwitz. I also learn this detail: Eugen has been invited for the premiere of "Rhinoceros" in Bucharest and he probably will go. I understand him very well: why wouldn't he take advantage of his fabulous luck, of his universal glory? But I ask myself: what could explain this outburst against me? Usually, he doesn't get angry except against his "competitors."

In fact, Ionesco did not travel to Romania on that occasion or later (how would he have profited from his "universal glory" by going to Bucharest?); and he could be angry with people's (political) ideas, past or present, whether they were his "competitors" or not. We do not know the context in which Ionesco may have spoken to Ierunca about Eliade, or whether Ierunca reported accurately what he had said; the only sure thing is that the postwar friendship between Eliade and Ionesco was not without its ups and downs, and that Ionesco's forgiveness of his former ideological enemy did not amount to a justification of that ideology itself, which continued to remain anathema for him throughout his life. In later years, the dialogue between Ionesco and Eliade was less troubled. In 1978, Eliade wrote the article "Eugène Ionesco and 'The Nostalgia for Paradise'" and participated in an international conference devoted to the playwright with a paper entitled "Lumière et transcendence dans l'oeuvre d'Eugène Ionesco."[15] Speaking of a mystical experience of light that Ionesco had in Romania at the age of seventeen (an experience recounted in Ionesco's conversations with Claude Bonnefoy[16] and, I might add, in his journals and interviews), Eliade calls attention to the important religious dimension of the imagination of the creator of the theater of the absurd. In his own religious quest, Ionesco got closer to the great scholar of religion that Eliade was, became

15. See Rosette C. Lamont and Melvin J. Friedman, eds., *Two Faces of Ionesco* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitson, 1978), 22–30; reprinted in Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 164–70; see also *Ionesco: Situation et perspectives*, ed. Marie-France Ionesco and Paul Vernois (Paris: Belfond, 1980), 117–28.

16. Claude Bonnefoy, *Conversations with Eugène Ionesco*, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 92.

an admirer of his work, and grieved after his death. In the journal of his old age, *La quête intermittente* (*The Intermittent Quest*), written in 1986, he lamented the loss of his friend: "I have such a wish to see Eliade, Mircea Eliade, again and I will not see him again, I will not see him again."[17]

What can explain Eliade's Legionary episode? In my view, Sebastian's diagnosis of "naïveté"—*political* naïveté, I should specify—was accurate. A sentimental nationalist, an Anti-Communist fearful of the danger posed to Romania by the imperialist designs of the Soviet Union,[18] Eliade believed for a time in the nebulous (pseudo)mystical theory of the "resurrection of the nation" advanced by Codreanu. Later on, he disassociated himself from that belief, but indirectly, ambiguously, through his fiction, and in a coded fashion, not publicly, as would have been desirable. He may also have thought—in a new form of self-delusion?—that his past convictions had had a certain (idealistic) legitimacy at the time and had become untenable and embarrassing as a result of historical crimes that were not supposed to have happened. He put the blame on what he called "the terror of History."

What counted, for Eliade, once the war was over, was his single-minded focus on his writing, on building his enormous scholarly work, on fully realizing his "genius" (which he did not hesitate, in his *Portuguese Journal* to compare favorably with that of Goethe!).[19] In Romania he had been highly successful as a novelist, and at the beginning of his four decades of exile, he thought he could replicate that success while pursuing, at the same time, without any slackening, his scholarly-philosophical activity. After the modest reception of *Forêt interdite*, he decided not to engage in any more in large-scale fictional projects, writing only novellas, that is, taking short "vacations" from his more serious and demanding scholarly efforts, indulging, as it were, in a sort of literary "reverie" (meant to satisfy what Gaston Bachelard called "la fonction d'irrél" or the "function of the unreal," an important psychological defense mechanism for the well-being of the mind). Eliade's shorter fictions, highly coded, are subtle games, more precisely literary equivalents of such painterly techniques as anamorphosis or trompe l'oeil, as I have argued elsewhere.[20]

(Apropos of Eliade's fiction, a recent occurrence prompts me to open a parenthesis with a brief comment on the old Latin saw, "Habent sua fata libelli"

17. Eugène Ionesco, *La quête intermittente* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 148.

18. It may be recalled that, as a result of the secret protocols of the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 23, 1939, which divided Eastern Europe between Germany and Russia, Romania was forced to abandon part of its territory (Bessarabia and Bukovina) in response to Stalin's ultimatum of June 26, 1940.

19. Mircea Eliade, *Jurnalul portughez şi alte scrieri* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006).

20. There is a detailed analysis of two of Eliade's stories, "A Great Man" and "Nineteen Roses," in my book *Despre Ioan P. Culianu şi Mircea Eliade: Amintiri, lecturi, reflecții* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2002).

["Books have their destinies"], a comment that, I am sure, would have made Eliade, in his identity as a Romanian writer, quite happy. His story of the supernatural, "Youth without Youth" (1976), which I included in *Youth without Youth and Other Novellas*,[21] a volume that went almost completely unnoticed, and that, according to the publisher, sold very poorly, was brought [by Wendy Doniger] to the attention of the film director Francis Ford Coppola, who wrote a screenplay based on it and shot, in Romania and elsewhere, a film by the same title. Indeed, "Habent sua fata libelli." The University of Chicago Press prepared a paperback edition of the novella that was released simultaneously with the movie, with a new introduction by Coppola.)

As for Eliade's Romanian identity, considered in more general terms, it definitely had both a visible face and a hidden one. The hidden one, as one may easily guess, had to do with his past engagement, with which he apparently never attempted to come to terms.[22] One of the reasons may have been the presence, both in Paris and in Chicago, of former members of the Iron Guard, whom he avoided antagonizing for fear of being exposed. At any rate, Eliade was a man with a secret, a secret that he refused to share even with his second wife, Christinel (whom he had married in Paris, in 1950), not to speak of his postwar close friends, such as Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca. On this subject, Monica Lovinescu notes in her *Journal*, after a telephone conversation with Eliade's widow (entry of June 6, 1995), who was complaining about what she saw as a "campaign" (initiated by Norman Manea) against the reputation of her husband:

> I continue to think of her while reading from Zigu Ornea's book on the extreme right in Romania in the 1930s, so engrossing through its quotations. When I come across Mircea's unbelievable articles during his brief Legionary period (1937–1938) and I remember that he had declared to us that he had never written such things and (infinitely graver) that he had sworn to her that he had never been a Legionary, I tell myself that it is unjust for her to bear all this. She doesn't understand a thing.[23]

21. Mircea Eliade, *Youth without Youth and Other Novellas*, edited and with an introduction by Matei Calinescu, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988).

22. For an extensive discussion of this question, see the chapter "L'impossible aveu" in Florin Turcanu's biography of Eliade (see note 7), 477–98.

23. Monica Lovinescu, *Journal, 1994–95* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002–6), 226. It should be added that, in the debate about Eliade's past, Monica Lovinescu wrote against Norman Manea and subsequent critics of Eliade, trying to minimize the significance of his Legionary engagement, but, in the face of undeniable documents, could not exonerate him completely, as Christinel expected her to do. The book referred to in the quotation is Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci: Extrema dreaptă românească* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1995); translated into English as *The Romanian Extreme Right: the 1930's* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 2000).

The question is: Why did Eliade go to such lengths to hide a past that he himself no longer believed in? What could explain his refusal, even posthumously (in his memoirs), to reflect sincerely on his own past, to submit himself to some sort of reflexive self-examination? One answer would be that he persisted in his "catastrophic naiveté" and that he did not fully realize his error or its importance. There are other possible hypotheses. My own theory is that he thought that any recognition, not only public but also in his personal papers, would have hurt the reception of his work, both during his lifetime and posthumously. Also, during his decades in exile, he may have feared that a reflexive confrontation with his past would have impaired his creativity, the free manifestation of his genius (which, in his mind, had nothing to do with politics).

What I find amazing is the coexistence of Eliade's absolute belief in his own genius, to the point of megalomania (expressed quite directly in *The Portuguese Journal*, later internalized, even in his post-1945 diary), and his social comportment, that of a modest man, somewhat shy, always attentive to the concerns of others, extremely generous and kind—as virtually all the portraits drawn by his former students and colleagues show him. Clearly, he was a man who knew how to keep a secret. As for his extraordinary pride in his own genius, it was for everybody who knew him, superficially or closely, totally invisible.

Be that as it may, Eliade's visible and active identity, as a major American scholar of Romanian origin who was never ashamed of his origin (unlike Cioran),[24] as a man who was ready to go out of his way to help whomever he found deserving and in need of help or guidance—irrespective of ethnicity or religion—has remained prominent in the memory of his numerous American students, colleagues, friends, or mere acquaintances of the last decades of his life. The testimony of Wendy Doniger, in her 2004 foreword to a reissue of Eliade's 1951 important book on *Shamanism*, is worth mentioning in this respect. She writes:

> I do work under his bright shadow in many ways, as do most people in the field of the history of religions, whether or not they acknowledge their debt. I am personally indebted to him for creating my career, transforming me from an ugly duckling of a Sanskritist into a swan-like historian of religion: he read my Harvard (Sanskrit) dissertation in 1968, published two chapters of it in his journal

24. See, for instance, Cioran's short essay, "A Little Theory of Destiny," in *The Temptation to Exist*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle/New York Times, 1968), 65–73, where he asks himself the question: "How can one be a Romanian?" See also my commentary in "How Can One Be What One Is? Reading the Romanian and the French Cioran," *Salmagundi*, no. 112 (Fall 1996): 192–215.

> (*History of Religions*) in 1969, brought me to Chicago as a full professor in 1978, and the rest is, if not history, history of religions.[25]

Some of the assumptions in his work are, of course, questionable—and Doniger goes on to question them quite pointedly—but not before noting: "In some quarters, the words of his name have . . . disappeared from the academic study of the history of religions. Eliade is no longer politically correct: his close friendship with several members of the notorious Iron Guard . . . during his early life in Romania is held by some to corrupt his work. Even for those who, like myself, knew the man and know that he was neither a Fascist nor an anti-Semite, there remains the more relevant problem of assumptions in much of his work" (xi–xii), and so forth. After discussing these "more relevant" problems raised by Eliade's methodology—problems that need not concern us here—she nevertheless concludes that "Eliade was right about a lot of things" (xv), which is to say that his scholarly work, while partially contestable or obsolete, is in large part still alive.

## III

Two decades before he was critically recognized as a major and innovative French playwright, the author of *La cantatrice chauve* (*The Bald Soprano*), *La leçon* (*The Lesson*), and *Les chaises* (*The Chairs*) was writing, in his Romanian polemical book *Nu* (*No*, 1934): "If I had been French, I would perhaps have been a genius." Wishful thinking on the part of a young writer (he was twenty-five at the time), living in a marginal and obscure European country with a no less obscure language, or a pointedly rebellious statement? Was he upset by the intellectual provincialism and the increasingly explicit and eventually virulent nationalism of his small native country in the schizophrenic years leading to the outbreak of World War II? Or was he simply joking?

But, first, who was Eugène Ionescu? Born in 1909 in Slatina, Romania, of a Romanian father and a mother of French-Jewish descent, he had lived in France between the ages of two and thirteen. His father, after completing his doctorate of law in Paris, had returned to Romania in the middle of World War I, in 1916, abandoning his wife with two small children in France for years. It was only in 1923 that, remarried after a dubious divorce in Romania (his

25. See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask, with a new foreword by Wendy Doniger (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), xi.

ex-wife had apparently not even been informed of the suit), the deadbeat father, a well-to-do lawyer now, claimed his children and showed himself ready to take care of them and to offer them an education in Bucharest. From the start, the future writer had a conflicted relationship with his father and sided emotionally with his mother, who decided to move to Bucharest too, to be near her children, and worked as an employee at the Romanian National Bank until her death in 1936. In 1923, Eugène Ionescu did not even speak Romanian (the first books he read were French, he had attended grade school in Paris, and his first juvenile writings were in French), but he learned the language quickly and made his publishing debut as a high school student in the literary magazine of the Saint Sava Lycée, which he was attending, in 1927, that is, four years after setting foot on Romanian soil. A year later he published poetry in Romanian in the little magazine *Bilete de papagal*, edited by the poet Tudor Arghezi. In 1931, while a student at the University of Bucharest, he published a volume of poems, *Elegii pentru ființe mici* (*Elegies for Tiny Beings*). At the same time, he started publishing broadly in the major cultural periodicals of the time, contributing articles in a distinctly unconventional tone, some of which were collected in 1934, in the brilliantly polemical volume *Nu* (*No*).

"If I had been French, I would perhaps have been a genius" is of course a rebellious statement, although apparently lighthearted, if read within the context of *No* as a whole: entering the role of an enfant terrible—but an enfant terrible endowed with a strong sense of self-irony and a pervasive consciousness of playacting—Eugène Ionescu sets out to demolish the literary reputations of some of the most highly regarded Romanian writers of the time (the poets Tudor Arghezi and Ion Barbu and the novelist Camil Petrescu, who was crushed in a comparison with one of his main models, Marcel Proust). But the author of *No* goes much farther: he takes to task not only the writers under scrutiny and the critics who had established their reputation but the institution of literary criticism in general, which cannot, in his view, be taken seriously. This is so because no single critical judgment can possibly be more valid than its symmetrical opposite. To make this point, to justify his deep-seated skepticism with regard to literary criticism, Ionescu wrote and inserted into the book two contradictory reviews of the recent novel *Maitreyi* (1933) by Mircea Eliade: the first highly positive, full of praise, the second scathingly negative, both of them sounding plausible within the mode of ambiguous caricature that is so characteristic of *No*.

One of the major themes of the young rebel's book is the backward cultural mentality of the country in whose language he is condemned to write, addressing, as he puts it, no more than "three hundred readers" who care for literature and read each other's works.

Romania is a "poor relative" of the Western European countries, almost a joke. As such it is torn between a (nationalistic) superiority complex and a frustrated inferiority complex, both of which prevent it from dealing with the real problems of human existence and culture. It is a ridiculous mixture of these antagonistic complexes that, for example, makes literary critics constantly identify Romanian writers in relation to their supposed Western counterparts and equals. Addressing himself to these critics, Ionescu urges them (at once laughingly and seriously) to refrain from this kind of silly procedure: "Don't say: Ion Barbu is our Mallarmé. Don't say: Eminescu is a Leopardi; don't say: Perpessicius is our Francis Jammes; Vulcănescu a Maritain; Paul Costin Deleanu a Berdyaev; Emil Gulian a Léon-Paul Fargue; Mircea Eliade a Papini. . . . And be aware that this is a traditional failing of the Romanians. Did not I[oan] H[eliade] Rădulescu for instance say that Enăchiță Văcărescu is greater than Goethe? That Bolintineanu is greater than André Chénier?" (*Nu*, 171). What happens in such self-serving comparisons is that the cultural nationalists, obsessed as they are with "national specificity" and "originality," are paradoxically stressing only the dependence of Romanian culture on more prestigious foreign models and on imitation of those models.

In the last part of his book, the young Eugène Ionescu addresses himself, in a tone of playful sarcasm, to "Doamnelor şi Domnilor" ("Ladies and Gentlemen"), that is, to those who represent the dubious elite of the Romanian society, blaming them for all of his country's failings, as well as his:

> You will say, maybe, that what you call my insolence is gratuitous. And so what, if it is indeed gratuitous? You will say that I lack the moral or intellectual authority to take you to task? . . . As a matter of fact it is you who don't have the moral or intellectual authority to reproach me for anything. . . . I accuse you . . . of all my failings of intelligence, culture, and intellectual experience, and of my lack of genius. If I had been French, I would perhaps have been a genius. . . . You are responsible . . . for the fact that westerners believe that Sofia is the capital of Romania and that Bucharest is the capital of Bulgaria; for the fact that the Romanian is, in the tired but knowing, clear-sighted eyes of the Frenchman or Englishman, an operetta character; it is your fault that the present-day generation will not be more intelligent and will fail like the generations that preceded us. It is you who are, finally, responsible for the fact that I don't have a solid culture in the humanities, for the fact that I read books with an effort, without pleasure, and only for the purpose of information; and for the fact that I am condemned to levity, because it is not necessary

> to improve oneself too much in order to excel in Romanian culture. It is because of you, in other words, that I don't want to be serious and that I cannot be serious, being, for better or worse, part of Romanian culture.
>
> I hereby declare that I am incommensurably pained by the fact that I am condemned to remain a poor relative of the European intelligentsia; by the fact that we are only three hundred individuals who preoccupy ourselves with ideas, ink, and paper—and poorly so—and that, for lack of readers, we only read each other; and this is one of the saddest things, one of my permanent "malaises."[26]

"If I had been French, I would perhaps have been a genius" is certainly the statement of a Romanian writer, an expression of a self-conscious Romanian writer's trouble with his own cultural identity. But it so happens that the writer in question had more than a vague desire to be French; he actually had, if not yet as a writer, a second, nostalgic French identity, through the ancestry of his beloved mother and, moreover, through having lived in France during his childhood, until his pre-teens. Let me add that the sense of this second identity was reinforced by the strong French influence on modern Romanian culture. It has been said that Romania was a "cultural colony" of France; and indeed, before World War II, French was the preferred foreign language of the Romanian bourgeoisie and intellectual elite, who regarded Paris as the cultural center of the world. Let me also add that, against the wishes of his father (who wanted him to become a lawyer, a doctor, or an engineer), Eugène Ionescu, attracted as he was toward a literary career, chose French as his subject of study at the University of Bucharest. During his last years in Romania, he was a teacher of French in the provinces and, eventually, in Bucharest.

He was, at the same time, a fairly prolific writer, an unconventional literary critic and journalist, a poet, an essayist, a budding novelist, a diarist—though not, paradoxically, a playwright; but his writing persona, as in *No*, easily and naturally assumed theatrical postures, and his polemicism was often full of histrionics, balanced by self-irony. In short, he had achieved by the mid-1930s a strong if uncomfortable identity as a Romanian writer. The discomfort grew in the later 1930s due to the politicization of the cultural life of the country—as the influence of the Iron Guard movement became increasingly pervasive and its doctrine was embraced by a steadily growing number of young intellectuals, some of them former close friends of Ionescu's. The story

26. Eugène Ionescu, *Nu* (Bucharest: Vremea, 1934), 277–78. *Nu* is not available in English, but it has been translated into French: Eugène Ionesco, *Non*, trans. Marie-France Ionesco (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

of the "collective hysteria" to which he had been witness in Romania's late 1930s was the subject, two decades later, of his allegorical play *Rhinoceros*. Interestingly, this play, written in 1958 when he was a famous French playwright named Eugène Ionesco, is set in a French provincial town, whose peaceful life is disrupted by the appearance, out of nowhere, of contagious rhinoceroses, spreading the absurd (at once comical and tragic) disease of "rhinoceritis." With the exception of Bérenger, who represents the author, all the other characters in the play become rhinoceroses, victims of the new ideological disease. No mention of Romania was made in the publicity surrounding the premiere of the play (including a number of author's interviews), although a few years later Ionesco himself was to recognize that he had first used the metaphor of the rhinoceros in his personal diary, in relation to the Iron Guard, while he was still in Romania.

Ionesco's French literary identity, as one of the founders of the "theater of the absurd" in a tradition going back to Alfred Jarry, is apparently unrelated to his Romanian identity. In fact, it is, in many ways, a rejection of that identity, together with a rejection of the figure of his Romanian father, an opportunistic lawyer who became a supporter of the Iron Guard in the late 1930s and a Communist soon after the war. The father is referred to in highly ambivalent terms not only in Ionesco's diaries, published in the late 1960s, but also in his autobiographical plays, from *Victimes du devoir* (*Victims of Duty*) to the later *L'homme aux valises* (*Man with Bags*) and *Voyages chez les morts* (*Journeys among the Dead*). And I would go further and say that the avant-garde quality of Ionesco's theater, particularly in his early French plays of the 1950s, has to do, by way of reaction, with the traditionalist-provincial-nationalist character of much of Romanian culture, which he had derided as early as the mid-1930s. One may say that Ionesco's choice of a French identity (facilitated by his familiarity with French culture, by the childhood years spent in France, by his maternal origins, by the knowledge of the language, etc.) had, for him, a liberating value vis-à-vis his older and uncomfortable Romanian identity.

French identity offered, of course, a great advantage: the access to universality, to what Pascale Casanova calls "international literary space" and the kind of prestige that can be achieved only by writing in a major, "dominant" language (as French was at the time, to be later undermined by the popularity of English). Although, at the beginning, he had difficulties writing in French (as he confessed to Claude Bonnefoy),[27] Ionesco overcame them with apparent ease. It is noteworthy, however, that his first French play, or "anti-play" as he called it, *La cantatrice chauve* (*The Bald Soprano*), was first written in Romanian

27. See Eugène Ionesco, *Entre la vie et le rêve: Entretiens avec Claude Bonnefoy* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

(its first versions date back to 1942) and later translated into French, to be first performed in 1950. Interestingly, the play is set neither in Romania nor in France but in England—an absurd England of language-learning manuals, full of the simplest conversational phrases and linguistic clichés, which can be readily taken out of context and used for comic effects. The author pointed out in various interviews that the play was inspired by his experience of trying to learn English from an *Assimil* handbook (the Romanian version is entitled *Englezeşte fără profesor*, or *English Self-Taught*, and the French version, before the final title was found, bore the title *L'Anglais sans peine*)—a language that, incidentally, he never really learned. The mere fact, which became the pretext of the play, that he wanted to learn English, an "enemy language," in the middle of the war, in 1942, in Romania—in a country that was at the time allied with detested Nazi Germany and that he wanted desperately to leave—may not be completely irrelevant. Of course, this slight relevance is lost if one takes the author at his word, namely, that he wrote the play in 1948, when he was already living in France. The year 1948 is probably when he finished translating the play from the Romanian, also adding scenes written directly in French, in an advanced phase of his apprenticeship of literary French, with a result that is nothing short of brilliant.

Ionesco's second play, *La leçon* (1950), is set in France, and the Professor who ends up killing his young female pupils (the character of *L'Elève*, we learn at the end, is victim number 40 of the day) seems to be thoroughly removed from the author's Romanian reminiscences. But we can discern, in the cruel absurdism of *The Lesson*, certain fleeting allusions that might acquire a minor significance in a biographical reading of the play. One such allusion is the protective "brassard" that *La Bonne* (the Maid) gives the murderous Professor to allay his fears toward the end of the play: on it, there is an insignia, "maybe the Nazi swastika."[28] The little episode, we are told in a footnote, was suppressed in the performance, "pour ne pas ralentir le rhythme." More important than this vague memory from the last war, which fits in only awkwardly with the atmosphere of the play, is the extended philology lesson, in which we can read a subtle, tongue-in-cheek, contradictorily "Ionescian" eulogy of the French language, an absurdist version of Joachim du Bellay's "*Défense et illustration de la langue française*." French is different from all the other possible and impossible languages, while being identical with all of them. Romanian is one of these languages (among Latin, Italian, Portuguese, nonexistent

28. See Eugène Ionesco, *Théâtre complet*, ed. Emmanuel Jacquart (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1991), 74. For the English version, E. Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano and Other Plays*, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 77–78.

Sardanapali, nonexistent neo-Spanish and Spanish, and nonexistent Oriental), all of which display what the Professor calls "identical resemblances." A brief example will suffice:

> LE PROFESSEUR . . . en espagnol: "Les roses de ma grand-mère sont aussi jaunes que mon grand-père qui était asiatique"; en latin: "Les roses de ma grand-mère sont aussi jaunes que mon grand-père qui était asiatique." Saisissez-vous les différences? Traduisez cela en . . . roumain.
>
> L'ÉLÈVE "Les . . ." comment dit-on "roses" en roumain?
>
> LE PROFESSEUR Mais "roses," voyons. Etc.[29]

Here, as in many of his later plays, Ionesco is actually playing (freely, imaginatively, exuberantly, absurdly) with his recovered French linguistic identity. It is a joyfully self-conscious confirmation of the statement he made in Romanian fifteen-odd years before: "If I had been French, I would perhaps have been a genius." By the logic of "identical resemblances," all languages (including Romanian) are actually French!

Starting from the 1960s, Ionesco, always "obsessed by politics," as he readily admitted, became a vocal supporter of Russian and East European dissidents, which brought him into conflict with French Communist or Communist-leaning intellectuals. The leftist intelligentsia saw in him a "reactionary." There is a sense of exasperation in what he said to Frédéric Towarnicki, in 1970, in an interview published in *L'Express* and reprinted in *Antidotes* (1977). He thought (correctly, as it turned out) that in Eastern Europe, including Romania, the experience of the war followed by that of "real socialism" had demystified both forms of totalitarianism (Fascist and Communist), and sometimes he felt that he would like to live in . . . Romania! This was, of course, a form of political daydreaming, expressing a strong polemical impulse. His statement is quite interesting if looked at from the point of view of identity:

> I learned how to read, write and reckon in French, my first books, my first authors were French. What I paid a steep price for was my contact with Romanian culture, if there is such a thing. It is within French culture that I feel least uncomfortable. However, it is in Romania that I sometimes would like to live now, in Romania where there is an opposition to Stalinism, where people no longer run the

29. Ionesco, *Théâtre complet*, 65–66. For the English version, *The Bald Soprano and Other Plays*: "PROFESSOR: . . . In Spanish: the roses of my grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who was Asiatic; in Latin: the roses of my grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who was Asiatic. Do you detect the differences? Translate this into . . . Romanian. PUPIL: The . . . how do you say "roses" in Romanian? PROFESSOR: But 'roses,' what else?" (pp. 67–68).

> risk of becoming supporters of the Iron Guard, because there, as in Poland, as in Czechoslovakia, both the right and the left have been demystified. Here, in the West, what remains to be demystified is the left, the right has already been so. . . . In Romania, when I was against the Nazis and the Iron Guards, I was not afraid to be perceived as a Bolshevik. And now, I am not afraid to be perceived as a reactionary.[30]

Ionesco's cultural identity was plainly French, but his political sensibility was closer to that of the East Europeans. The contact with Romanian culture—"if there is such a thing"—had cost him dearly, but so did his life in a society still captive to leftist illusions, in which part of the progressive intelligentsia considered his democratic ideals of individual freedoms (so-called formal freedoms) irrelevant if not downright reactionary. In his late years, Ionesco managed a reconciliation between his two identities, in his journal of old age, *La quête intermittente* (1987) and even more clearly in a statement made in December 1989, during the dramatic days of the Anti-Communist popular uprising in Romania: "I was born in Romania, I came to France when I was very young, I am French by my culture, but I feel I am becoming Romanian again. I will not return to live in Romania, but I hope to go there on a last journey" (*Libération*, December 23, 1989).[31] However, very soon, when he realized that the new post-1989 Romanian regime was, under a facade of democracy, in large measure a continuation if not of Communism, of the power of party apparatchiks and the old secret police, he gave up the idea of a trip to his native country in which, as a young man, he had felt "in exile."

## IV

In spite of his occasional irritation with being a Romanian early on in his exile (I have noted his "disgust with Romanianness" in 1946), Eliade never tried to forge a new identity for himself (as did Ionesco and, of course, Cioran, who after 1949 wrote only in French and even refused to speak Romanian with fellow Romanian exiles or visitors from the old country).[32] Ionesco, however, even as a world-famous French playwright, could not erase his second Romanian identity: he may have made fun of it, he may have felt uncomfortable

30. Eugène Ionesco, *Antidotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 100–101.

31. Cited after the chronology of Jacquart, in *Théâtre complet*, civ.

32. An anecdote Cioran liked to tell offers a humorous illustration of his attitude: a longtime Romanian émigré writer in France once asked him what precisely he should do in order to become a French writer. "Are you married?" Cioran asked him. "I have been married for many years to a Romanian," the émigré answered. "Then, as a first step, you should divorce her immediately," Cioran told him.

about it, he may have been embarrassed by it, but it remained a part of his self, a principle of internal conflict that subtly underlies a significant part of his French work, and more obviously his last oneiric plays, based on recurrent dreams or nightmares of being trapped in his native country, a totalitarian hell. These plays were written during some of worst years of N. Ceauşescu's National-Communist dictatorship in Romania: *L'homme aux valises* was published in 1975; *Voyages chez les morts* appeared in 1981. In a way, they may have performed the function of an exorcism, for in his later years, he was less and less bothered by his second identity, to the point that, when it was clear that Communism had been defeated in his native country, he felt himself "redevenir roumain." Ionesco never forgot Fascism; even though he established friendly relations with Eliade and Cioran, he certainly did not do so before he had severely confronted them with their reprehensible commitment, as I have pointed out.

Eliade's attitude in the postwar years was defined by what became an increasingly strong personal imperative, namely, the imperative of "creation as duty." In his dialogue with Claude-Henry Rocquet, Eliade recalled: "Speaking for the Romanians in Paris, I said that we weren't émigrés but that we were exiles"; he stressed that the exiled writer had to deal with the loss of his native land in a constructive, creative way, taking as a model not Ovid, who lamented his banishment and was dominated, in the "barbarian" city of Tomis, by nostalgia for Rome, but Dante, who "accepted deprivation, and . . . it was thanks to that exemplary experience that he was able to complete the *Divine Comedy*." Asked by Rocquet if he had ever been a "man of *ressentiment*" (in the sense of Nietzsche or Max Scheler), Eliade answered: "No, I felt that the experience of exile possessed the value of initiation. . . . We must accept the separation of exile and, above all, create. Creation is the only answer one can give to fate, to the 'terror of history.'"[33] Creative work as an end in itself, as an autotelic activity, seems to have been for Eliade both a duty and a means to salvation from history and temporality. We are "condemned to history," as he wrote in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, in the second volume of *A History of Religious Ideas*, but this raises the question of how each one of us "must at all costs find *in the world* a way that leads into a transhistorical and atemporal place." The answer offered by the *Gita* is "doing one's duty (*svadharma*) in the world but doing so without allowing oneself to be prompted by the desire for the fruits of one's actions," while being fully conscious that "to live in the world, to participate in its structures, does not constitute an 'evil act.' The 'evil act' is to believe that

33. See Mircea Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Roquet*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 94.

the world and time and history possess an independent reality of their own, that is, to believe that *nothing else exists* outside the world of temporality" (italics in the original).[34] Eliade, we may say, believed that *something else exists* and that it could be attained by fulfilling one's duty for its own sake: his own duty being to create, to devote himself entirely to his work, to ignore whatever might interfere with the task he had set for himself.

His Romanian identity as an exile in the West, combined with the initiatory perspective from which he considered exile, was, as we just saw, a stimulus. Was it also a justification for hiding certain inconvenient aspects of his political past, particularly in the autobiographical part of his work? Of course not, but we must keep in mind that he was, as Mihai Sebastian put it in his *Journal*, a politically naive intellectual, even though, in the historical circumstances in which Sebastian wrote, his naïveté had taken on a "catastrophic form." Sebastian was right to record the words of Eliade at the time, in order to make him blush later, when things would settle down. If Sebastian had lived to read them to Eliade after the war, Eliade would certainly have been profoundly ashamed. Not unlike others with a similarly tainted past (the case of Paul de Man comes to mind), he chose to remain publicly (and even privately) silent about it. But truth will out. Now that we have a clearer image of his errors and slipups, the question is whether, in Wendy Doniger's words, they "corrupt his work." They certainly diminish the credibility of part of his autobiographical writings (which from now on must be read for both what they say and what they do not), but the value of his scholarly work must be established by means of other criteria. It remains for present-day and future religious historians to do this job.

As a literary critic, I am primarily interested in Eliade's fiction. His postwar novel *The Forbidden Forest* (written roughly between 1949 and 1954) and his stories of the fantastic appear in a new light if one relates them to history (including *la petite histoire*) of the 1930s and 1940s. The main character of the novel is Stefan Viziru, a young engineer and a convinced democrat in the explosive political situation of Romania at the time. Viziru is falsely arrested by the dictatorial government imposed in 1938 by King Carol II, is interned in a prison camp with members of the Iron Guard (as Eliade himself had been), and refuses to sign a disavowal demanded by the police. His reason is that he cannot renounce something that he has never been and, on the other hand, he does not want to forswear a generational solidarity that goes beyond politics. He is finally liberated and, after the dramatic war years, ends up in exile in Paris. Viziru is not a self-portrait of the author, although his portrayal contains

34. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas 2: From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 243.

many autobiographical elements (among them the character's simultaneous love for two women, which has a parallel in Eliade's memoirs, although in the novel it is developed along obviously fictional-symbolic lines). *The Forbidden Forest* swarms with secondary characters, as one may expect from any vast historical novel, but the extremely complex plot and the contrapuntal handling of the episodes point to a metahistorical horizon: a reader even vaguely familiar with Eliade's work will discover numerous narrative illustrations or just suggestions of his deeper themes: the disguises of miracle, the dialectic between the sacred and profane, *coincidentia oppositorum,* a particular obsession with solstices and with the religious as well as pagan customs, festivals, and superstitions linked to them. To give one example: the story starts at the time of the summer solstice, during the night of June 23–24: this is the midsummer night, the night of "midsummer madness," haunted by witches and supernatural beings, also linked since archaic times with peasant fertility and erotic cults, but it is also Saint John's Night in the Christian calendar, celebrating the birth of John the Baptist. It is a magic time, somehow out of time, since, etymologically, when it reaches the solstice, the sun seems to stand still for several days. In Eliade's postwar fiction (not only in *The Forbidden Forest*), the solstice represents a different quality of time, a privileged time, a pause in the ineluctable ongoing flow of Chronos.[35] The action of the novel covers a period of exactly twelve years, that is, a "cosmic year," beginning in 1936 and ending in 1948, on the same midsummer night, with the death of Viziru in a car accident in the forest of Royaumont near Paris. It so happens that in 1936 Eliade was getting close to the Legion of the Archangel Michael, the mystical-terrorist organization of Codreanu. His most outspoken articles on behalf of the Legion or the Iron Guard (I use the two words synonymously) were published in 1937, but already in 1936 his close friend Mihail Sebastian was writing in his diary, on September 25:

> He is a man of the right, with everything that implies. In Abyssinia he is on the side of Italy. In Spain on the side of Franco. Here he is for Codreanu. . . . The most absurd and trivially tendentious news items find in him a gullible listener. And he has a naïve way of getting worked up and raising his voice, to spout—without so much as a smile—some baloney that he has heard in town or in the offices of *Vremea* or *Cuvântul*. . . . I should like to eliminate any political reference from our discussions. But is that possible? Street life

35. I have analyzed the meaning of the summer and winter solstices in *The Forbidden Forest* at greater length in my review article "Between History and Paradise," *Journal of Religion* 59, no. 2 (April 1979): 218–23.

> impinges on us whether we like it or not, and in the most trivial reflection I can feel the breach widening between us. Will I lose Mircea for no more than that? Can I forget everything about him that is exceptional, his generosity, his vital strength, his humanity, his affectionate disposition, all that is youthful, childlike, and sincere in him? I don't know. And I keep having more and more disillusions, not least because he is able to work comfortably with the anti-Semitic *Vremea*, as if there were nothing untoward about it. Nevertheless I shall do everything possible to keep him" (78–79).

Intriguingly, *The Forbidden Forest* starts in 1936, on the day of the ninth anniversary of the founding of the Legion of the Archangel Michael on June 24, 1927. Could it be a mere coincidence? And, if not, in what way may this coincidence—never mentioned in the novel itself—shape the rare knowledgeable reader's expectations and interpretations? All the more so as Codreanu's movement is not presented in a favorable light, and the central character, Stefan Viziru, is clearly opposed to its ideology. The main point of the novel is to explore, obliquely, solstice mythology in its relationship with the events of everyday life in a time of great crisis, in a manner that comes close to what has been called "magical realism." One may even say that, from the point of view of Viziru, who on that specific midsummer night has the strange epiphany of an automobile in the middle of a forest near Bucharest and falls in love with Ileana, this is a fateful occasion, whose foreboding meaning escapes him: it is, in narrative terms, a prolepsis or prefiguration of the end of the novel with the car crash in the forest of Royaumont, in which Stefan and Ileana perish. Ileana, whose presence in Stefan's life is parallel to his marriage to Ioana, whom he continues to love as before (but Ioana and his son die in a bombing in 1944), appears to have been an "angel of death," as the author notes in his diary just after he finished the novel. But for Stefan she had been, on the contrary, a promise of "something else," of some undefined mythical dimension of life, an encouragement in his quest for an exit from ordinary, ultimately meaningless time. The numerous other characters and subplots, which make the reading of the novel increasingly difficult if not frustrating, are carefully crafted and thought out, but their function in the overall construction is often hard to determine. The logic of *coincidentia oppositorum* is at work all the time, but its results are too ambiguous to sustain the reader's interest in the narrative development. At any rate, the coincidence of dates pointed out earlier, if deliberate, could only mean that Eliade intended to revisit fictionally the recent historical past of Romania, from which he was secretly distancing himself through the hero of his novel.

The novellas of the fantastic that followed are mostly, if not exclusively, peopled by Romanian characters. The mixture of myth, folktale, and reality is always there, and the logic of *coincidentia oppositorum* is used to bring about unexpected, but often intriguing, reversals of situations, mysterious changes of identity, magical metamorphoses, sudden ruptures and displacements in chronological time, irruptions of the supernatural in the banality of day-to-day life. Astronomical symbolism, numerology, and esotericism play a major, if rarely obvious, role in their construction. The historical time frame in which their action is set is that of the twentieth century, with insistent returns to the 1930s and with frequent extensions well into the postwar period (many take place in Communist Romania). Reading attentively, one can discover in them hidden puzzles, very subtly and carefully put together, puzzles that contain other puzzles, ultimately unsolvable, amphibologies, possible allegorical meanings that are canceled out by other, equally plausible allegorical meanings. Many of these stories have a political dimension, but the political is seen in mythical-religious categories or as a paradoxical point of encounter between the "logic" of the profane and the "illogic" of the sacred. Thus, a Communist secret police interrogator (Albini, who appears in more than one of the novellas), a representative of the profane, is nevertheless said to have been a poet in his youth and to have a good knowledge of the gnostics. Marxism itself is seen as a form of millennialism in a gnostic version. In the novella *The Old Man and Bureaucrats*, a high Communist official, a member of the Romanian CP Politburo, Anca Vogel, is genuinely fascinated by the literary qualities of the tall tales told by a retired teacher, who has been arrested under suspicion of knowing about an anti-Party plot—and the official eventually loses her job because the conspiracy theorists, her rivals, manage to "decode" from the old man's innocuously charming tales details of a would-be plot in which she herself would have been a major participant.

As might be expected, there are few direct references to the Legionary movement in Eliade's later novellas, but the savvy and suspicious reader will discover quite a few possible allusions, whose meanings, however, remain enigmatic. There is textual evidence for several mutually exclusive interpretations. As in illusionistic painting or drawing, seen from a certain angle the story suggests one image, but a slight change in the angle yields a completely different image. Eliade seems to play an elaborate game, a literary equivalent of those visual puzzles and tricks whose simplest version is the rabbit/duck image: the viewer can perceive it or "construct" it as the image of a rabbit or that of a duck, but never both at the same time. Written quickly, in intervals of rest from his erudite scholarly work, these novellas have, as I said earlier, a psychologically compensatory role; they are literary forms of daydreaming or, rather,

literary extensions of daydreaming in which the manifest content hides the latent content, makes it secret, and impenetrably so. Writing in Romanian—although without any certainty that he would be published in Romania—Eliade of course reinforced his Romanian identity. Moreover, after 1964, when the regime underwent a process of mini-liberalization until 1971, and even after that date, when the dictatorship of Ceauşescu became increasingly harsh, many of Eliade's postwar novellas (but not *The Forbidden Forest*) received the imprimatur of the Communist censorship.[36] Eliade was even invited, at times insistently, to visit Romania, but his precondition for such a homecoming trip, namely, to see his entire oeuvre published in Romanian, was never fulfilled, and he never went back.

The recent publication of his *Portuguese Journal* has given rise to a variety of responses in Romania. Citing certain passages in which Eliade envisions his future exile and in which he seems to welcome the opportunity to address his philosophical and scholarly works to a universal audience, creatively separating himself from the "minor culture" of Romania, a young writer proposed that the postwar Eliade had actually renounced his Romanian identity and should be regarded as an American scholar.[37] I disagree. As I have tried to show, Eliade was proud to see himself as a representative, on the scene of international intellectual life, precisely of the "minor culture" in which he had been, for better or for worse, a major actor in his youth. He not only considered himself a Romanian but believed that his country had a cultural (as opposed to a political) future, and even that it could "save" itself through culture—only through culture. Ionesco, as we saw, did not think much of Romanian culture—"s'il y en une"—"if such a thing exists." For him, it was in French culture that he felt "moins mal"—"less uncomfortable." He is, after all, a French author, with a Romanian literary past—an unfortunate biographical accident that may well be ignored, and that actually is ignored by most of those who write about him in French, English, and other languages, except, of course, Romanian (leaving aside the tiny minority of Western critics who happen to know Romanian and who are aware of the fact that the capital of Romania is not Sofia).

In the cases of both Eliade and Ionesco, the postwar decision to live in exile was primarily politically motivated, but it also had important, if initially unintended, cultural implications. However difficult the early conditions of their permanent displacement, the impossibility of returning to their native country

36. Thus, the volume *La ţigănci şi alte povestiri ["With the Gypsy Girls" and Other Stories*] (1969) containing both prewar and postwar novellas and short stories; and *În curte la Dionis* [*At the Court of Dionysus*] (1981), consisting exclusively of fiction written in exile, including "The Old Man and the Bureaucrats."

37. See Cătălin Avramescu, "Mea culpa în 'Cazul Eliade,'" *22*, no. 855 (July 28–August 3, 2006).

carried, as I have already pointed out, an immense cultural advantage: for they found themselves in a central place in the "world republic of letters," as opposed to a marginal one. Both of them were forced to face a much tougher competition for recognition than would have been the case in Romania, where Eliade was already famous and Ionesco knew, as he had stated in 1934, in *No*, that "it is not necessary to improve oneself too much in order to excel in Romanian culture." In the new, materially hard but intellectually stimulating conditions of exile, Eliade, a writer and a scholar, had to choose scholarship as a road to success; a virtually unknown writer in a minor language has to beat much longer odds in order to be recognized in translation, as Eliade himself realized early on when his best-selling novel in Romanian, *Maitreyi* (1933), translated into French as *La nuit begali* in 1950, passed almost unnoticed, and then again, in 1955, when the same thing happened with the more ambitious *Forêt interdite*. It was only much later, and due to the huge reputation of the religious scholar, that Eliade's fiction started to elicit more interest—as is indicated, among other factors, by the filming of *La nuit bengali* (directed by Nicolas Klotz in 1988, and starring Hugh Grant; now available on DVD) and the reissuing of the book.[38] More recently, in 1995, with the growing interest in postcolonial studies, the University of Chicago Press released an English translation of *Maitreyi* as *Bengali Nights* together with Maitreyi Devi's response to Eliade's thinly disguised autobiographical story: *It Does Not Die: A Romance*, originally published in 1976.

Although he could write his essays and scholarly studies in French, and later in English, for Eliade the natural language of literary expression (as well as the language in which he dreamed, as he once said) remained Romanian. His choice of public identity was certainly influenced by this linguistic limitation. A scholar of international stature, he continued to see himself as a Romanian writer in exile and saw exile, as already pointed out, as an initiatory test.

Ionesco, as we saw, was able to abandon the language of his literary apprenticeship, Romanian, and return to the language of his childhood years: in this he was helped by his deepening ambivalence toward his father (who died in 1948, in Romania) and by the cherished memory of his mother (who had passed away twelve years earlier, in 1936), but most directly by immersing himself in spoken French as well as in contemporary French literature. The adoption of a French literary identity had for him, from the beginning, the sense of a liberation, as is conveyed by the joyful, ludic dimension of his early absurdism. Before reconciling himself, in old age, with his Romanian identity, Ionesco had to contest it, to free himself from it by becoming a full-blooded French

38. Mircea Eliade, *La nuit bengali*, trans. Alain Guillermou (Paris: Gallimard, 1950).

writer, an innovative playwright, and the "genius" he could never have become in Romania. By the way, the theater of the absurd turned out to be at once a French and an international phenomenon: first, its main representatives were foreigners writing in French (Samuel Beckett came to Paris from Ireland, Arthur Adamov from Russia, Ionesco from Romania); second, it was, in the wake of World War II, perhaps the last French literary movement to have a widespread influence abroad, through Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard (in England), through Edward Albee (in the United States), through Václav Havel (in Czechoslovakia), through Slawomir Mrozek (in Poland), and through Kobo Abe (in Japan). Interestingly, among the absurdists, Ionesco was the closest in spirit to the French classics: in a way, one might say, he rewrites Molière, and not only when he clearly alludes to him, as in *L'impromptu de l'Alma* (1956) in which, much as Molière does in *L'impromptu de Versailles* (1663), he makes fun of the ponderous vacuity of the theories on theater articulated by contemporary critics (Roland Barthes among them). For Ionesco, postwar political exile in France was actually a cultural homecoming, and he regarded his native Romania as a country of temporary exile, to which he returned only in nightmares. The language of his dreams, unlike Eliade's, must have been French.

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# 6

# The Poetical and Rhetorical Structure of the Eliadean Text: A Contribution to Critical Theory and Discourses on Religions

*Daniel Dubuisson*
*Translated from French by Andrew Meehan*

For aphorisms, except they should be ridiculous, cannot be made but of the pith and heart of science; for discourse of illustration is cut off; recitals of examples are cut off; discourse of connexion and order is cut off; descriptions of practice are cut off. So there remaineth nothing to fill the aphorism but some good quantity of observation: and therefore no man can suffice, nor in reason will attempt, to write aphorisms, but he that is sound and grounded.

—Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*

Another great abuse of words is the taking them for things. This, though it, in some degree, concerns all names in general, yet more particularly affects those of substances. To this abuse those men are most subject who confine their thoughts to any one system, and give themselves up into a firm belief of the perfection on any received hypothesis: whereby they come to be persuaded, that the terms of that sect are so suited to the nature of things that they perfectly correspond with their real existence. . . . But yet, if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence

hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats.

—J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Following the pioneering works of Ivan Strenski and Leon Volovici, I and others have devoted numerous critical studies to the ideas developed in the now controversial writings of Mircea Eliade. So I will not here repeat arguments I have made elsewhere, which have already been widely discussed.[1] Rather, I would like to draw attention to the rhetorical and poetic processes that Eliade used as a vehicle for his ideas. These processes present a number of "typical" traits.[2] They are recurrent from one book to another and reveal the existence of a *poiesis* that is coherent, global, and inseparable from the ideology they convey. In Eliade's prose, "form" and "substance" are inextricably linked. These features merit further investigation.

1. Summarized in brief:

> After the war, in France and then in the States, Eliade began the formidable task of re-writing, at the end of which he succeeded in transposing his favourite ideas from the 1930s into his work as historian of religions. Ultimately his conceptions of the Sacred, of *homo religiosus*, of archaic ontologies, of myths of reintegration, of blood-sacrifices and orgiastic rituals, actually form a fantastic, barbaric picture that is nothing but the "religious" translation of his earlier political obsessions. In both universes—the "political" universe of the '30s and the "religious" universe of the post war years—all notion of spiritual progress is absent, as is all moral consideration, all positive conception of rights, all ideas of justice, all faith in the critical activity of reasoning. In both "universes," and in a symmetrical way, one finds a celebration of the pagan native condition, the same fixation with history (considered, as in the manner of modern science, as a Jewish invention!), a categorical rejection of social progress, an obsessive fascination with sex and death, a sanctification of archaic or primitive worlds, an exaltation of all forms of elitism, a close affinity with esoteric traditions, and a sovereign disdain for equal rights. Eliade's work, then, carries within itself—transfigured but recognizable—the principal themes tied to his fascination with occult movements as well as his involvement with the Iron Guard—an involvement he was never obliged to deny, as he had never acknowledged it, looking instead, as he was, for any means to cloak it.

See Daniel Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies: Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade*, trans. Martha Cunningham (London: Equinox, 2006), xvii–xviii.

On his side, Strenski has written:

> Both Eliade's religious vision and the political vision that influenced him share the same framework of a common human project, even if they render it in different "codes." This common 'code' can, I think, be summarized as follows:
>
> 1. The radical traditionalism of the Romanian right becomes for Eliade not a mere political programme; but a sweeping ontological judgment upon the material, secular, modern world, asserting the value of nostalgia for the archaic, cosmic and telluric, understood as fundamental human categories.
> 2. The profound mythico-religious, Romanian Orthodox *cum* "volkish" feelings of the Romanian right become for Eliade the basis of his dominant religious viewpoint and of the particular sort of universal religious vision he embraces—archaic, cosmic and telluric.

See Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 102.

2. Pierre Bourdieu, *L'ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988), 12. Bourdieu is here referring to Heidegger's style.

In the first place, they define a certain "style," identifiable by a characteristic tone, a certain grandiloquence, and a specific lexicon. While this style bears examination, it is not the only element that should be taken into account, for it is always intimately linked to a series of *topics*.

Taken literally, the *topic* (French: *sujet, motif,* or *thème majeur*) defines that remarkable "thing" the text is speaking about. Its name is endowed with an emblematic quality.[3] For example, it is the "myth," the "symbol," the "*homo religiosus*," the "sacred," the "sacred versus the profane," and so on. These *topics* are few in number (fewer than a dozen) and, like characters in a soap opera, recur from book to book.

Beneath the surface, each of these topics acts as the nucleus of a corresponding *topos*. This *topos*, forming the place of the *inventio*, is in fact an amalgamation of very general arguments and ideas, and not very original ones at that.[4] These common ideas provide the text with "premises of a very general order" that can always be traced to other sources.[5]

This series of *topoi*, this trove of "common" sources, in turn form a third level, which is the Eliadean *topics* itself (here, the word *topics* is in the singular' French: *la topique*). From this *topics*, the text develops its own schemata of mimesis and of semiosis. The first define the "nature of the things" the text describes,[6] and the second define what signification (scientific, metaphysical, moral, political) should be given to them. These general schemata thus define the ontology of each *topos*, while serving as a guide to the reader. They point the reader in the right direction, because without this double system of coordinates, numerous texts would probably remain incomprehensible, as happens when we read a text that is alien to our culture, when we do not have the keys or codes to its mimesis and its semiosis.

3. Preceded in French by the definite article *le* or *la*, which in this context raises it to the status of an essence: *the* myth!

4. See Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, II-XIII-6,

> The invention of speech or argument is not properly an invention: for to invent is to discover that we know not, and not to recover or resummon that which we already know: and the use of this invention is no other but, out of knowledge whereof our mind is already possessed, to draw forth or call before us that which may be pertinent to the purpose which we take into our consideration. So as to speak truly, it is no invention, but a remembrance or suggestion, with an application; which is the cause why the schools do place it after judgement, as subsequent and not precedent. Nevertheless, because we do account it a chase as well of deer in an enclosed park as in a forest at large, and that it hath already obtained the name, let it be called invention; so as it be perceived and discerned, that the scope and end of this invention is readiness and present use of our knowledge, and not addition or amplification thereof.

5. Fernand Hallyn, *La structure poétique de monde: Copernic, Kepler* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), 17–24.

6. A text can say of the thing it describes that it is true or false, natural or marvelous, probable or undeniable, that it happened or that it probably never will! It can treat the thing with seriousness or irony, in an allegorical way or in documentary mode, and so forth. Although there are numerous possibilities, they are all traceable to a tradition.

We shall see that these different levels (style, *topoi*, schemata of mimesis and of semiosis, and *topics*) not only are indissociable and complementary, but, more important, they are interdependent. Each one involves the other, and vice versa. Moreover, in its own way, Eliade's work illustrates the central theme of constructivist epistemologies, in that the cognitive process intervenes in the construction of the object it is supposed to analyze to such an extent that—as is the case here—it ends up replacing it.[7] These Eliadean *topics* are not merely defined by the arguments present in their respective *topoi*; they are quite literally created by them.[8] In other words, the "myth" or the "symbol" that Eliade speaks about does not exist outside the texts he himself has written to describe them. They are pure verbal creations and thus have no referents other than themselves. They might be described in Stéphane Mallarmé's terms as "knick-knacks of resonant inanity" or, after Bacon, as *fallacies*. This explains why these same *topics*, with their closely related *topoi*, present similarities (often profound and ancient) with other discursive objects found in other texts.[9] Their mutual "world" (the only one they know) is the world of cultural intertextuality.[10]

Style, *topoi*, schemata of mimesis and of semiosis, and *topics* together establish the coherence of the Eliadean text. This coherence is the condition sine qua non of his cosmographic pretensions, of his immoderate ambition to set out the metaphysical foundations of the world and of history.[11] For, in the end, the hermeneutics Eliade associated with his poetics had no other objective than this.

## Eliade's Style

The history of religions is not comparable to other anthropological disciplines.[12] Viewed from the outside, two characteristics distinguish it:

7. See Paul Watzlawick, ed., *L'invention de la réalité: Contribution au constructivisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988); Jean Louis Le Moigne, *Les épistémologies constructivistes* (Paris: PUF, 1995), 67–75; Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

8. Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 2003), x, 5–7.

9. The Eliadean myth and the platonic myth; the Eliadean "sacred" and "sacred" of R. Otto; Eliade's "sacred/profane" opposition and that of R. Caillois; etc.

10. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982).

11. Daniel Dubuisson, *Anthropologie poétique (Esquisses pour une anthropologie du texte)* (Louvain: Éditions Peeters, 1996), 55–78.

12. The history of religions offers the curious characteristic of being conceived by many of its "specialists" not as a province of history or anthropology but as a sort of ancillary science of metaphysics or theology. It is almost like having a university department dealing with astrophysics that also employed astrologers, who claimed their point of view was of irreplaceable value and even preeminent!

1. Historians of religions frequently incorporate theological or metaphysical considerations into their analysis. Such considerations are unacceptable, since they refer to systems of belief rather than to protocols for scientific analysis.
2. Likewise, such authors readily employ a certain distinctive style that contrasts sharply with the normally neutral style of ordinary scientific writing. For these writers, one cannot speak about "religious" subjects as one speaks about normal things. Style is one of the most visible traits allowing the author to signal immediately the importance of what he has to say. For the reader, the style acts as a "director" or "pointer," calling upon him or her to adopt a particular attitude when reading the text, an attitude that gives due respect to the "religious" themes.

There are two stylistic options for these authors. Not surprisingly, irony plays no part in either of them. The first option employs tone: it must be serious, even grave. Dense and heavy like a tombstone, it should discourage any impulse for critical thinking. Clearly in this category one would place the epigones of the German philosopher Heidegger. The authors who prefer the second option, on the other hand, choose to use expressive, suggestive language sustained by a much more lyrical tone.[13] Here, obviously, the author is not addressing the critical faculties of his reader. He is above all trying to move him, to raise in him some particular emotion. Eliade, whose lyricism is averse neither to grandiloquence nor to a certain prophetic tone,[14] belongs to this second category.

If Eliade had a gift, it was that he was able to write in a language that seduced the general public. Expressions such as "total existence," "higher significations," "transmutation of the cosmos," "cosmic significance," "innate plenitude," the "mystery of totality," "superhuman way of being," and so on, should really raise nothing more than an amused smile, but in fact one has to admit that these turns of phrase have captured the imaginations of generations of readers. Clearly, readers liked this rhetoric, particularly where it was often accompanied—like a good novel—by a note of mystery. As with any effective form of seduction, this mysteriousness has often paralyzed (or anesthetized) the critical faculties of the reader. Looking beyond this initial observation, can we now see where this seduction comes from, and how it can be explained?

13. Daniel Gold, *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion Modern Fascinations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 51–52.

14. "The History of Religions, as I at any rate understand it, is a 'liberating' discipline. . . . Hermeneutics could become the only valid justification of that History. A historical event will justify its appearance when it becomes understood. That could mean that things happen and that History exists only to force humanity to recognize those things." Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un Journal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 537.

Eliade's books contain dozens of expressions like these. As I have said, they do not address our analytical capacities or our critical faculties. These expressions are chosen only for their evocative power. And we might note that the vaguer they are, the more evocative they become.[15] Such devices are the poetical tools of "religionists" and mystics, and they do not constitute any form of progress in the order of scientific knowledge.

The vocabulary chosen by Eliade also serves to strengthen his own stylistic choices. Not merely does it strengthen them, it exalts, it glorifies them. One of his favorite processes consists in applying mystical[16] ("sacred," "divine," "spiritual," etc.) and empty ("total," "cosmic," "deep," "complete," "superior," "higher," etc.) predicates to the most general notions ("nature," "spirit," "existence," "soul," "life," "being," "universe," "reality," "totality," etc.). With its total lack of rigor and precision, this vocabulary provides us with a vague outline of the contours of Eliadean metaphysics. Within the mystical universe of Eliade, ordinary, concrete things and beings are "transfigured," yielding their place to pseudo-essences: that is, to beings both impalpable and ethereal. One gains access to these sublime realities by "rising" to the place where they "emerge," "show" themselves, are "unveiled" or "revealed."

This process allows him to create a surprising effect: a mysterious, atemporal, unreal atmosphere. How would a naive mind react if a scientist claimed to be about to unveil the "mystery of totality," to teach the "experience of cosmic sanctity," to reveal the "primordial religious meaning" or the "act of coming to be"? The pleasure is left to the reader, armed with this basic lexicon, to create amusing pastiches. These will surely be easy to compose, for any noun at all can be associated with any epithet. This proves that in this purely verbal and poetic universe there is no such thing as error; nor are any truths or refutations possible, since here sanction by observation, analysis, comparison, or study is inconceivable. The original—the fruit of the "total hermeneutics" defended by Eliade—is not distinguished from the false, the pastiche, or the play on words, for they are both placed beyond the exigencies of analytic reason. In what way can the two Eliadean expressions "original completeness" and "mystic communication" be distinguished from "integral substance" or "primordial sanctity"—phrases I have just invented? How are these first two expressions, the work of a man who was "incontestably one of the most eminent historians of religions today," more scientific than the other two?

15. Here again, Bourdieu is commenting on the prose of Heidegger. See Bourdieu, *L'ontologie politique*, 31.

16. For this paragraph, see Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*, 187–88.

## The Eliadean *Topics*

The Eliadean *topics* themselves amount to a fairly straightforward system. At the first level, the *topics*—as textual and discursive objects and obviously not as objects of the world—are very few in number, fewer than a dozen. They have the most commonplace names possible: "myth," "symbol," "image," "*homo religio*sus," and the opposition "sacred/profane." These terms are present in the intellectual history of the Western world, and many have been used for centuries. One might be tempted to refer to them as a series of familiar leitmotifs. Far from being original concepts, they belong to our intellectual tradition, to our memories of schooldays, and to our *doxa*.

The various *topoi* associated with them have a fundamentally simple structure. None of them are problematic, none are contradictory, none polemical, since their structure is as homogeneous and uniform as their ontology. Their ontology is inspired, moreover, by a well-known Platonic schema: each particular symbol, for example, is part of the essence of the symbol, in that it is a manifestation of the sacred.

These *topoi* are interchangeable: what Eliade says about one of them can easily be applied to any of the others. The arguments and the language used to speak about the myth can in turn be used to evoke the symbol. So, these *topoi* are mutually paraphrasable, which means that the general and common arguments of each *topos* are used to justify the existence of the others, and vice versa.[17]

Finally, these arguments are essentially made up of metaphysical postulates on which Eliade founds his own concept of transcendence. This series of arguments has practically no original qualities,[18] either metaphysical or heuristic. As the governing framework of his writings, Eliade chose another equally well-known notion, that of "endemic essentialism,"[19] and was usually content to recycle ideas into his system that were borrowed from others.[20] These arguments are familiar from all the "perennialists" and all the "religionists." Eliade's

17. This could be seen as functioning like a particular form of the sui generis mechanism; see McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 5: "*Sui generis* religion is to that degree an ideological construct whose authority is based on its supposedly autonomous existence."

18. For a demonstration, see Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*, chap. 13, "Primitive Ontology," and addendum 5, "The Eliadean Conception of Symbolism."

19. I borrow this expression from Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 112.

20. One could refer, for example, to the study of Paola Pisi, *I tradizionalisti' e la formazione del pensiero di Eliade* in *Confronto con Mircea Eliade: Archetipi mitici e identita storica*, ed. Luciano Arcella, Paola Pisi, and Roberto Scagno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998), 43–133.

greatest originality was perhaps that he brought in examples coming from primitive and Oriental civilizations.

These *topoi* thus form a system that was closed, in that any argument valid for one of them was valid for all the rest, but also self-contained, in that they were valid only for each other. Under these conditions, the Eliadean text is condemned indefinitely to repeat its own postulates and, in so doing, to paraphrase itself, even to quote itself![21] So it cannot put any critical distance between itself and the world because the real world is kept apart from its universe of "fallacies."[22] In any case, this critical distance is refuted a priori in the name of a metaphysical status granted—again a priori—to each *topic*.

## Semiosis and Hermeneutics According to Eliade

In the Eliadean text, rhetorical and poetic processes are not restricted to telling us what *topics* are important or what they consist of. They also rule over a surprising semiosis and hermeneutics. The former sets out a priori what the *topics* mean; the second, in a highly unscientific way, tells us what we need to do to find this out! It is not easy to say much more, because Eliade refrained from analyzing the complex mechanisms[23] to be found at the origin of the symbolic phenomena he evokes. It seems highly likely that he had no inkling of the inherent complexity of the phenomena of semiosis.

He was also apparently unaware that these phenomena are always and necessarily inherent in a given language and culture, and that, as such, they possess a fundamentally historical and anthropological existence. The same is true of their production, circulation, reception, and interpretation. Eliade disregards all the authors who, in the twentieth century, tried to analyze and better understand the mechanisms that occur in the course of any semiotic production, whether symbolic or textual. With Eliade we are offered the chance to observe the near-ideal functioning of a type of discourse that, in claiming that meaning exists in a timeless or transhistorical way, too often abstains from any real analysis and demonstration.

21. But we know that a text gains authenticity in the reader's eyes by quoting itself. See Philippe Hamon, *Introduction à l'analyse du descriptif* (Paris: Hachette, 1981), 80.

22. "And lastly, let us consider the false appearances that are imposed upon us by words, which are framed and applied according to the conceit and capacities of the vulgar sort. . . . To conclude therefore, it must be confessed that it is not possible to divorce ourselves from these fallacies and false appearances, because they are inseparable from our nature and condition of live" (Bacon, *Advancement*, II-XIV-11, extract).

23. As indicated, after others, by Talal Asad; see his *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 31.

Today,[24] any general theory of symbolic function as a whole implies that symbols are defined first of all in terms of their status, that is, the intertwined conditions of their production (social, historical, psychological, ideological, etc.), their major semiotic characteristics, their formal and/or logico-semantic properties, their possible ways of interpretation, and, finally, their multifaceted role in the life of individuals and groups. Although he placed symbol at the center of his conception of religious universes, Eliade brings to these requirements merely dogmatic and vague responses inspired by a summary metaphysic that, as such, cannot be subjected to elaborate evaluation or rigorous examination. What befits them, rather, is a type of lyrical paraphrase punctuated with mysterious expressions, almost incantations—evidently endowed with a faint conceptual value—such as "profound sources of life," "act of coming to be," "sign of the beyond," "primordial religious meaning," "mystery of totality," "superior mode of being," "sacred presence," "mystic communication with nature," and so on.

Even though he was a contemporary of their creators—Peirce, Frege, Saussure, Wittgenstein, Russell, Cassirer, Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, Sperber, Benveniste, Searle, Todorov, and so on—Eliade never discussed modern linguistic, philosophical, and semiotic theories. To read him, one would be unaware of the very names of these authors who nonetheless were responsible for the most valuable contributions to the understanding, analysis, and history of the symbol—as, for example, Todorov's *Theories of the Symbol*. In the same way, Eliade neglected to confront the formidable theoretical difficulties revealed by different hermeneutical researches (from Schleiermacher to Dilthey, Gadamer, Husserl, Wittgenstein, and Ricoeur) in their project of accounting for the understanding and interpretation of textual meanings. These remarks are there to remind us that Eliade's work—even though it seduced many in the university—wisely kept itself a good distance from any serious or difficult epistemological debate.

This position did not prevent Eliade from defining a priori the interpretative posture that his readers should adopt. At the same time as he writes his books, Eliade lays out the conditions in which they shall be received and interpreted. These are the very same conditions that he attributes (again a priori) to the religious facts that he is studying. An identical postulate establishes both the simplistic semiotic structure of the object studied and the brief hermeneutic reasoning devoted to interpreting it.[25] We are looking here at a rudimentary rhetorical process, one that is reminiscent of tautology.

24. This paragraph restates Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*, 268–69.

25. In this sense, Eliade is also a distant heir of the old exegetical and allegorizing tradition of the Neoplatonic philosophers: Henri-Dominique Saffrey, "Les néoplatoniciens et les mythes grecs," in *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, sous la direction de Yves Bonnefoy (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 771–77.

Because it is essentially projective, an interpretative posture such as this demands as hollow and empty a pretext as possible. This posture will not, in any case, seek to escape from the tautology it was almost entirely founded upon: religious phenomena possess religious meaning that can only be understood religiously! Its corollary consists in making a religious criticism of any criticism of (history of) religion.[26] Mystical discourse has always excelled in the supreme art that consists of imposing the only acceptable approach to a reading. For[27] if, in the same stubborn way as Eliade, all thinkers are free to claim to speak of—and in the name of—"a sign of the beyond," or "primordial religious meaning," we, as incredulous and simply curious readers, do not have to respect the pressing injunction that he tacitly formulates—which is that, given the noble subject under discussion we should abandon all critical impulse and all search for rational explanation. On the contrary, we must provoke a healthy epistemological inversion: our indigenous and "religious" categories must be considered as "objects of study," not as tools of knowledge.[28]

## Textual Coherence and Cosmographic Formation

Although these elements (stylistic processes, tone, lexical choice, stock of *topics*, semiosis, and hermeneutics) present many shortcomings from a scientific point of view, they offer in exchange a large degree of coherence. This coherence is reinforced as usual by the well-known intrinsic architectonic properties of the text, of any text (unity, homogeneity, isotropy, coherence, order).[29] We are faced here with an interesting paradox that warrants our attention, for it does not concern only Eliade.

Any poetic creation,[30] of whatever dimensions, is always a *cosmologia* (or one of its fragments), "a grand theory or an overarching symbol system that could unify the world."[31] Any cosmology is first a cosmogony, which leads to the creation of universes that are themselves of irreproachable metaphysical

26. Paraphrasing Bourdieu; see his *L'ontologie politique*, 73.

27. From here to the end of the paragraph is a restatement of an extract of Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*, 178.

28. Steven Engler, Dean Miller, and Daniel Dubuisson, "Review Symposium, Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*," *Religion* 36, no. 3 (2006): 168; McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 129, 147.

29. On these points I refer to the "textual poetics" developed in Dubuisson, *Anthropologie poétique*, 67–78.

30. The following is inspired by Daniel Dubuisson, "Contributions à une poétique de l'œuvre," *Strumenti Critici* 85 (September 1997): 449–66.

31. Robert Ellwood, *Politics of Myth: A study of C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 174.

consistency. It sets in place (or forms) a hierarchy of beings, places, and times, in which each thing takes its providential place as part of a perfectly intelligible whole.

In our minds, these poetic creations take the place of the real world to offer us a complete, intelligible, and ordered vision.[32] Each one of them is self-contained and incomparable. The worlds according to Marx, Freud, or Eliade are three incommensurable universes, forever alien to each other. It is impossible to inhabit these worlds simultaneously. For this reason, it is also pointless to attempt to correct them on one aspect or another, or to try to improve them. What is the point in trying to correct a myth or a poetic formula?

On the opposite side, human sciences almost invariably tend to break up human reality into pieces. This operation of splitting up or parceling usually avoids a comparable effort to construct intelligible syntheses. We are today seeing a never-ending multiplicity of theses and monographs without simultaneously witnessing the creation of cognitive models that would allow a systematic, rather than a merely cumulative, recapitulation of their results.

It is a well-learned lesson, but one that is worth repeating: the poetic text always tells us much more (and often tells it much better) than any scientific monograph.[33] Within this "much more," we can probably find all humanity's desires and dreams, but also all its fears and anxieties. The struggle between them is not an equal one. If such "cosmographic formations" succeed in taking the place of the real world with such ease, it is also because there is no point that is external to the world, no hilltop from which we might be able to take in its totality. An exhaustive description of the human world (whether scientific or not) should inevitably include a description of itself, and thus, by revealing the moment and the place of its expression, be forced to recognize its own infirmity.

In any case, a descriptive project such as this would be interminable (for we cannot wait until our description of the world is finished before thinking about it and living in it; indeed, we probably would not want to) and would be an exhausting and perplexing task for its author: in what place would he choose to ground it? In what order should he place things? What angle of sight should he favor? It is precisely because the world is indescribable and needs nevertheless to be seen *globally* in order that its reality be lived that these poetic works can so readily replace it.

32. This vision can clearly act as a discourse to justify a "cosmographic formation." On this last notion, see Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 195–213.

33. Michael Riffaterre, *La production du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), 45–60.

## Reception of the Eliadean Text

Are the previously mentioned traits sufficient in themselves to explain the extraordinary success, both past and present, of Eliade's work? I am tempted to think so, but I would add some supplementary explanations. From the formal point of view of the enunciation, we can observe the presence of these additional traits in the Eliadean text:

1. Absence of any enunciation mark referring to a particular historical context: the Eliadean text is poles apart from the "thick description" of Geertz.[34]
2. Absence of any form of modality: the Eliadean text knows only categorical assertions.
3. Equally absent is any form of metalinguistic reference that might introduce an element of reflexivity, and thus critical distancing.

In these three aspects, his implicit enunciation protocol resembles the uniform and monotonous metaphysical universe described in his books. In the same way that he uses only familiar *topics*, Eliade consistently relies on all the nostalgias and metaphysical fables that the "essentialism endemic"[35] Western world has imagined throughout its history to describe nature, the sacred, origins, gods, and the beyond.[36] Eliade never strays far from those themes contemporary journalists call the "search for meaning," "aspirations for the beyond," the "mysteries of existence,"[37] and so on. These themes belong to the spiritual subculture of our time and, in much more elaborate forms, to our metaphysical tradition. Eliade, as a true guru, continually awakens the relevant anxieties and speculations while claiming that he, Eliade, knows the answers to these enigmas.

We too often forget that the scientific approach is not a spontaneous and immediate activity of the human mind. On the contrary, its practice requires a sort of intellectual asceticism that allows us to become aware of, and then detach ourselves from, our indigenous categories, our deep-rooted prejudices, our dear fallacies: *Elenchi magni, sive de idolis animi humani nativis et adventiis.*[38]

34. Gold, *Aesthetics and Analysis*, 60–61; McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 13.

35. Plato and the Neoplatonic thinkers of the ancient world and the Renaissance, R. Otto, contemporary phenomenology, but also the "perennialists, hermetists and modern day esotericism" (R. Guénon, J. Evola).

36. Daniel Dubuisson, *Impostures et pseudo-science l'œuvre de Mircea Eliade* (Lille: Septentrion, 2004), 160–62.

37. What Wiktor Stoczkowski in *Des hommes, des dieux et des extraterrestres* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), 379, calls "the appeal of metaphysical postulation." Now, commonly accepted postulates, he adds, are indifferent to facts and contradictions!

38. Bacon, *Advancement*, II-XIV-11, 138.

Eliade, on the other hand, uses every rhetorical trick likely to seduce and attract his reader. The reader's curiosity is aroused all the more as he is drawn towards facts presented as "signs" of ultimate or transcendent realities, as manifestations of "a world of a purely spiritual nature." This supernatural nebula might profitably be compared to the financial "bubble" created on the stock market by excessive speculation that has no basis in the real economy.

This having been said, it is true that Eliade had a keen sense of—and even a capacity to predict—certain aspects of the contemporary zeitgeist. Among the numerous "second comings" of the religious figure regularly predicted by the prophets, in the midst of contemporary reconstitutions of this same figure, the type of ecumenism that Eliade defended on the fringe of the established churches must have seemed very attractive in many people's eyes. We must also recognize that Eliade, with his ability to popularize, was bold enough to build bridges between academic culture, the Orient, the primitives, and prehistory, though never forgetting the "spiritual" preoccupations of his readers. It is true that Eliade was not an academic in the usual meaning of the word but rather an essayist and a polygraph anxious to please as much the general public as the scholarly public.

## Conclusion

It is tempting to say that, in the disguise of a university work, Eliade continually made use of the kinds of rhetorical and poetic processes used by novelists[39] trying to capture their readers' imagination by convincing them of the "reality" of their fictitious universe. Was this outcome not inevitable? When one is indifferent—as Eliade so assertively was[40]—toward the study of historical contexts and common anthropological functions, what is left? What else can one create apart from a poetic universe peopled by unreal entities, by "fallacies"?

We should not be surprised that form and substance correspond so well in Eliade's books. This complicity is not the result of any sort of mysterious

39. It would undoubtedly be instructive to compare the literary processes Eliade used in his novels with those he chose for his "essays."

40. Mircea Eliade, *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 47: "I must add that I will approach all these phenomena as a historian of religions, which is to say, I will not attempt to discuss their psychological, sociological, or even political contexts, meanings, or functions (leaving that to those who may be better qualified to do so)."

"But [this little book] is not a study in the history of religions in the strict sense, for the writer, in citing examples, has not undertaken to indicate their historico-cultural contexts"; Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 18.

predestination or miraculous symmetry between word and thing. The reason is—as always—much more trivial. Eliade simply complied with a long intellectual tradition that demands that religious *topics* be treated with a certain lyrical tone, using conventional arguments and an equally stereotyped lexicon. Eliade was perpetuating a rhetorical tradition, and he used easily identifiable poetic processes: he is neither a Joyce nor a Faulkner! Whether it is in his style, his *topics*, his conception of semiosis, his hermeneutics, or the metaphysical questions he raised, it is clear that Eliade, at bottom, was not original. His writing took its place seamlessly in the long and multiform tradition that preceded him, from Plato to René Guénon—which probably explains why the general public welcome his major topics so quickly and took them so readily into their hearts.

# 7

# Modern Western Esoteric Currents in the Work of Mircea Eliade: The Extent and Limits of Their Presence

*Antoine Faivre*

The term "modern Western esoteric currents" (henceforth MWEC)[1] designates a variety of religious, spiritual, and/or philosophical currents that bear a family resemblance[2] and that have flourished from the beginning of the early modern period (end of the fifteenth century) until the present in the Western world (understood as the culture permeated by Christianity and "visited" by Judaism and Islam).[3] Among them are, for example, Christian Kabbalah, Neo-Alexandrian hermetism, Renaissance "magic," "spiritual" alchemy, and Paracelsian and Neo-Paracelsian forms of philosophy of nature. Later came Theosophy (Jacob Böhme and his followers) and Rosicrucian literature and associations, and, later still, the so-called

1. This specialty within the discipline history of religions (and/or religious studies) has now been granted formal recognition; for example, endowed chairs have been created—first, in 1967 at the École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences réligieuses (Sorbonne), subsequently in 1999 at the University of Amsterdam, and as recently as 2006 at the University of Exeter (UK).

2. I regard this family resemblance as the expression of a "form of thought," which I do not intend as "universal" but merely as present within the ambit of the period considered (i.e., Western history since the advent of the early modern period). See, for example, Antoine Faivre, "Introduction," in *L'esotérisme*, 4th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France [Que Sais-Je?], 2007), and Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), xxi.

3. As a consequence of these latter traditions being excluded from the primary definition of "Western," Jewish Kabbalah, for example, is thereby omitted from the list of "modern *Western* esoteric currents."

Occultist current. This family resemblance seems to me to be evidenced by four notions that they have in common:

1. Correspondences between the various orders of reality, visible and invisible;
2. Living nature (as in, for example, the notion of *magia*, which views nature as alive);
3. Imagination and mediation; and
4. Experience of transmutation, meaning that the individual undergoes a transformation or "metamorphosis."[4]

The purpose of this essay is, first, to examine the presence of these currents in Eliade's works as they appear in his fictional and scholarly publications; second, to demonstrate that his limited interest in this domain foregrounds some currents more than others, despite the demonstrated historical importance of the latter; and, third, to advance some possible reasons that might account for this asymmetry of attention.

## MWEC in Some Works of Fiction by Eliade

Eliade's "fantastic tales" contain some passages indicative of his interest in the MWEC. For instance, in "The Secret of Dr. Honigberger," when describing the narrator's visit to Dr. Zerlendi's library, which contains many thousands of books, he devotes a whole page to the section pertaining to what this narrator calls the "occult" (actually, a considerable part of the MWEC literature). We

4. More explicitly: (1) *Correspondences* between the symbolic and real and between the visible and invisible cosmos ("as above so below"). There are two types of correspondences: (a) those in nature (between microcosmic and macrocosmic entities such as the planets and parts of the body (see, for example, astrology), and (b) those that exist between revealed texts (the Bible), history, and even nature. (2) *Living nature* as exhibited through the notion of *magia*, which views nature as alive—inhabited and traversed by a light or a hidden fire or "spirit" circulating through it. (3) *Imagination and mediations*: the former notion accounts for the use of intermediaries (mediations) such as rituals, symbolic images, and entities or spirits, and develops a form of "gnosis" to penetrate the "hieroglyphs" of nature. (4) *Experience of transmutation*: a transformation or "metamorphosis" of the individual through what is often termed a "second birth" in which knowledge or gnosis and inner experience, imagination, and intellectual activity are united. This taxonomy is completed by two further elements, which I call "accidental" (or "incidental") because they appear more rarely in the form of thought considered. They are (1) *the systematic practice of the "concordance,"* or the attempt to establish common denominators between two different traditions (or even all traditions), in the hope of obtaining an illumination—a gnosis—of superior quality; and (2) *transmission or "initiation"* from master to disciple, within a group claiming the right to impart that initiation. On this taxonomy, see, for example, Faivre, "Introduction," xxi–xxv. This is, of course a "construct" designed merely to begin to define the contours of a field of study; it was, like any "construct" of this sort, subjected to some reappraisals by other scholars.

read: "The library was extremely rich in the classics of occultism, hermeticism, and traditional theosophy."[5] Indeed, the following authors are present therein: Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, Jacob Böhme, Emanuel Swedenborg, Antoine Fabre d'Olivet, Rudolf Steiner, Stanislas de Guaita, Karl von Hartmann, Charles Webster Leadbeater, Annie Besant, as well as many European alchemical books (by Arnauld de Villeneuve, Dom Pernety, and others).[6] But this corpus appears to be a mere appendix, as it were, of the library: the majority of the shelves are filled with books dealing with Orientalism, predominantly Hinduism.

In his novel *Viata noua*,[7] which he wrote in 1941 during his stay in Portugal and never brought to completion, he describes another library, much smaller than the former one ("no more than 200–300 volumes"). The owner's name is Tuliu (perhaps a kind of Eliadean alter ego). Here, the proportion of titles related to MWEC is greater than in Dr. Zerlendi's library, and we find works by Allan Kardec, Arthur Edward Waite, Annie Besant, Papus, Rudolf Steiner, Julius Evola, René Guénon, Gustav Meyrink, and, not least, issues of the journal *Études Traditionnelles*. While writing *Viata noua*, Eliade was keeping a "diary of the novel," in which under the date of July 27, 1941, we find the following note:[8]

> I should not fail to get back to Tuliu some time, in a special chapter where I have to explain his philosophy, so that one does not take him to be some sort of a second-rate occultist for fairs. At bottom, his theories are not totally uncongenial to me. Tuliu will say what, for various reasons on which this is not the place here to insist upon, I never had the courage to recognize publicly. Hardly did I, in the presence of some friends, recognize my "traditionalist" convictions (to use Guénon's terms).[9]

5. Given that Jacob Böhme is mentioned in Eliade's list, the expression "traditional theosophy" here seems to refer to the theosophical current that began to flourish at the beginning of the seventeenth century. But it could also be construed as a reference to the Theosophical Society, since Leadbeater and Annie Besant are also mentioned. Apropos the Theosophical Society, let it be noted that another figure in this tale is Bucura Dumbrava—a friend of Carmen Sylvia, who was at that time a well-known follower of H. P. Blavatsky. I am indebted to Radu Dragan for this observation.

6. Mircea Eliade, "The Secret of Dr. Honigberger," in *Two Tales of the Occult* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 75–76. Original edition and title of this tale: "Secretul Doctorlui Honigberger," in *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* (Bucharest: Uniunea Fundațiilor Culturale Regale, 1940).

7. *Viata noua*, published in Eliade, *Jurnalul Literar* (Bucharest: Ministerul Culturii, 1999), 154–55 (this is the first edition of this book). I am indebted to Radu Dragan for this information.

8. Besides the aforementioned names, we find those of Rimbaud, Poe, Baudelaire, Paul Vuillaud, Fritz Saxl, and Erwin Panofsky. I am grateful to Radu Dragan for having translated for me the relevant passage from Romanian into French.

9. *Viata noua*, 212. My translation into English is made from Radu Dragan's French translation from the Romanian. Natale Spineto has already quoted a part of this passage in his article "Mircea Eliade and Traditionalism," *Aries: The Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 1, no. 1 (2001): 68n48.

From the presence of names like Evola and Guénon (besides the mention of the journal *Etudes Traditionnelles*) and the passage in the diary quoted earlier, it is evident that Eliade took a marked interest in the so-called traditionalist or perennialist current when he was writing *Viata noua*.

## MWEC in Eliade's Scholarly Works

Which are the MWEC mentioned in Eliade's scholarly works, and what place do they occupy therein? Eliade's attention had turned toward some of the MWEC rather early. In 1926 he wrote an article on Rudolf Steiner, followed by another in 1927 (also on Steiner), and the same year an article on Theosophy.[10] In the years 1928 and 1929, he penned the first three of the eleven chapters of a dissertation ("Italian Philosophy from Marsilio Ficino to Giordano Bruno") that he was intending to present at the University of Bucharest.[11] At that time, according to an interview he gave in 1979, he was "fascinated not only by the fact that through this philosophy of the Renaissance, Greek philosophy had been rediscovered, but also by the fact that Ficino had translated into Latin the Hermetic manuscripts, the *Corpus hermeticum*."[12]

But at the end of the 1920s, the influence of the Orient had already begun to predominate in his choices of research topics. As a result, the "occult philosophy" of the Renaissance was no longer one of his cherished interests. But we see it cropping up occasionally in his writings. In 1974, in a paper delivered in Philadelphia, entitled "The Occult in the Modern World,"[13] Eliade celebrates the fact that "contemporary scholarship" (as represented by Frances A. Yates, in particular) had felicitously discovered "the important role magic and Hermetic esotericism played . . . in the Italian Renaissance."[14] Shortly thereafter, in 1976,

10. Radu Dragan, personal communication. The two articles on Steiner are "Rudolf Steiner," in *Adevarul Literar si Artistic*, June 20, 1926) and in *Cuvàntul*, April 13, 1927; the other article mentioned previously (on the Theosophical Society, presumably, rather than Christian theosophy) is "Teosofie?" in *Cuvàntul*, October 22, 1927. Mutti gives the references in *Eliade, Geticus e gli altri* on pp. 41–42 of the Romanian edition (Bucharest: Vrenea, 2003), a page that strangely enough is not extant in the Italian edition (Claudio Mutti, *Eliade, Vâlsan, Geticus e gli altri: La fortuna di Guénon tra i romeni* [Parma: Edizioni all'insegna del Veltro, 1999]).

11. Published in French under the title *Contributions à la philosophie de la Renaissance: Suivi de Itinéraire italien*, 4th ed. (Paris: Gallimard [Arcades], 1992).

12. Mircea Eliade and Claude Henri Rocquet, *L'epreuve du labyrinthe, entretiens* [de Mircea Eliade] *avec Claude-Henri Rocquet* (1978; reprint, Paris: Rocher [Transdisciplinarité], 2006), 31 (English ed.: *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982]).

13. Mircea Eliade, "The Occult in the Modern World," *Journal of the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis* 1, no. 3 (September 1974), 195–213, reprinted in Mircea Eliade, *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 47–68.

14. "The Occult in the Modern World," in Eliade, *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions*, 56.

he devoted a seminar at the University of Chicago to alchemy and hermetism in the Renaissance.[15] Furthermore, his *History of Religious Ideas* contains three pages on Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Giordano Bruno.[16] Certainly, he could hardly have given greater development to MWEC in a work claiming to encompass the immense field announced in the title; but certain omissions are surprising. To wit, Christian Kabbalah is almost entirely ignored,[17] and Christian Theosophy (the esoteric current that flourished from the beginnng of the seventeenth century onward with Jacob Böhme until the middle of the nineteenth and occupies an important place within the religious history of Christianity) is—except for a brief reference to the name of Johann Georg Gichtel[18]—conspicuous for its absence. Gichtel was, indeed, one of the main representatives of that current in Germany in the seventeenth century, but Eliade mentions him only with reference to alchemy, whereas alchemy is a rather minor topic in Gichtel's works.

Elsewhere, Eliade touches upon Christian Theosophy, but at random, as it were—notably apropos the theme of the androgyne, the object of an essay read at an Eranos conference in 1958. In this essay, he devotes the better part of two pages to two of the main representatives of that current, Jacob Böhme and Franz von Baader. Interestingly, however, he does not quote them from their original texts but uses secondary literature only.[19] Similarly, in the same piece, he devotes a few lines (without giving any reference) to the celebrated theosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, yet even that simply to highlight Honoré de Balzac's *Seraphita*.[20] In "The Occult in the Modern World," the theosophers Jacob Böhme, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin are mentioned, but merely apropos Eliphas Lévi's readings.[21]

Likewise, it is in a short section in his *History of Religious Ideas* on modern alchemy that Eliade lumps together Paracelsus, John Dee, and the Rosicrucians

15. Eliade and Rocquet, *L'Epreuve du Labyrinthe*, 129.

16. Mircea Eliade, "Humanisme, néo-platonisme et hermétisme durant la Renaissance," in *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses: De Mahomet à l'âge des réformes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Payot, 1983), 262–66 (English ed.: *The History of Religious Ideas, from Muhammad to the Age of the Reforms*, vol. 3 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985]).

17. Nevertheless, he has found it appropriate to complete this passage of his book with a footnote that presents a bibliography of scholarly references on Renaissance hermetism and Christian Kabbalah—but not on Christian theosophy (*Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*, vol. 3, 344).

18. Eliade, *Histoire des croyances*, vol. 3, 266.

19. Mircea Eliade, "Mephistopheles and the Androgyne of the Mystery of the Whole," in *The Two and the One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 78–124. The passage mentioned earlier is on pp. 101–3. This Eranos paper was first published in the *Eranos Jahrbuch*, no. 27 (Zurich, 1959).

20. Eliade, "Mephistopheles and the Androgyne," 99.

21. It should be noted, however, that in "The Occult in the Modern World" Eliade was not supposed to dwell more on Christian Theosophy, because the passage in question rather concerns Eliphas Lévi, and more generally the so-called occultist current in Lévi's wake (see later discussion).

of the seventeenth century.[22] As a result, a reader not familiar with these names may be led to believe that they are linked mostly to the history of alchemy. In reality, this is far from being the case: they rank among the main representatives of some of the major MWEC.[23] Eliade did not publish the fourth volume of his *History of Religious Ideas,* which would have dealt with the period from the eighteenth to the twentieth century; as a result, we can only surmise to what extent he would have dealt therein with the MWEC of that period. In his essay "The Occult in the Modern World" (1974), he devotes three pages to Eliphas Lévi, Papus, the Martinist Order created by this latter, Stanislas de Guaita, the Abbé Boullan, H. P. Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, and Aleister Crowley[24]—that is, to a number of the most prominent figures of the so-called occultist current that flourished from the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century—plus another page to esoteric movements following in their wake, such as the Builders of the Adytum (founded by Paul Foster Case in 1922) and the Church of Light (founded by Elbert Benjamine in 1932).[25] Eliade had evinced a certain interest in the Theosophical Society (created in 1875) and its founders (notably H. P. Blavatsky) at least as early as the 1920s (see earlier in chapter); it is even possible that the first studies read by Eliade on the religions of India were books published by the Theosophical Society.[26] References to this movement crop up here and there in his work: for example, in 1964 he devotes a somewhat ironical discussion to Blavatsky's "fantastic statements,"[27] and in his 1974 essay he seems to take sides with René Guénon, who sharply criticized her.[28]

Among MWEC proper, alchemy is most highlighted in Eliade's scholarly works.[29] He stresses the fact that, first, it has been the transmitter of some of the

22. Paracelsus and Dee are hardly mentioned; the Rosicrucians are dealt with in one page.

23. Eliade, *Histoire des croyances,* vol. 3, 266–72.

24. Eliade, "The Occult in the Modern World," in *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions,* 49–51. Joséphin Péladan and Aleister Crowley also appear in his essay "Mephistopheles and the Androgyne of the Mystery of the Whole," 99–100.

25. Eliade, "The Occult in the Modern World," in *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions,* 62.

26. Consider Natale Spineto, "Mircea Eliade and Traditionalism," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 1, no. 1 (2001): 68n47: "It may be conjectured that the first studies of the religions of India that Eliade read were books published by the Theosophical movement: in a page from a 1923 diary, the young Eliade expresses the wish to read the originals of the Sanskrit works published in translation by the Theosophists." Spineto's remark is based upon Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots (1907–1945)* (New York: Boulder, 1988), 74.

27. Published in *La nostalgie des origines: Méthodologie et histoire des religions* (Paris: Gallimard [Essais CLVII], 1971), 96–97 (original ed.: *The Quest* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969]), 96–97. Note that Eliade here situates the project of the Theosophical Society within the context of the early developments of a new discipline: the history of religions.

28. Eliade, "The Occult in the Modern World," in *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions,* 51.

29. See notably the subchapter "Alchemia e cosmologia," in Paola Pisi, "I 'tradizionalisti' e la formazione del pensiero di Eliade," in *Confronto con Mircea Eliade: Archetipi mitici e identità storica,* ed. Luciano Arcella, Paola Pisi, and Roberto Scagno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998), 48–53. Let us note in passing that the very first article that the

hermetic traditions of late antiquity; second, that the aim of the Western alchemists was to become the redeemers of nature.[30] His aforementioned 1976 seminar at the University of Chicago was devoted to alchemy and hermetism in the Renaissance, and in the same year he traced a short history of European alchemy from the Renaissance to Newton.[31] His presentation of this esoteric current is part of a discussion devoted to what he calls "initiatic themes," "patterns of initiation," and "present in the great religions,"[32] or to archaic ritualistic practices.[33] More generally, he uses alchemy as a kind of catchall in which he puts together a variety of authors such as Paracelsus, Dee, and the Rosicrucians, whom he otherwise hardly mentions and who are actually part of the domain of the MWEC.

Besides alchemy, another current is very often present in Eliade's work, a relatively recent one: perennialism (also called the Traditionalist school, in view of its insistence on the existence of a "primordial Tradition"), which appeared in its specific form in the 1920s.[34] René Guénon is usually considered its founder, although Guénon is not without forebears. It is also represented by authors like Julius Evola, Frithjof Schuon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Seyyed Hosseyn Nasr, and many others. It is a current that, in some important respects, stands outside the pale of MWEC proper, to the point that many of its representatives prefer to use the term "esoterism" rather that "esotericism" to distantiate themselves from the MWEC proper.[35]

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young Eliade published (in *Ziarul stiintelor populare* at the age of fourteen!) was entitled "How I Discovered the Philosophers' Stone." I am indebted to Radu Dragan for reminding me of this fact.

30. See in particular his Haskell Lectures given at the University of Chicago in 1956 under the title *Patterns of Initiation*, published in French as "Thèmes initiatiques dans les grandes religions," in *Initiations, rites, sociétés secrètes: Naissances mystiques—Essais sur quelques types d'initiation* (Paris: Gallimard [Idées], 1959), 261–62.

31. Mircea Eliade, "Le mythe de l'alchimie," in [Cahier de] *L'Herne: Mircea Eliade* (Paris: L'Herne, 1978), 157–67; new ed. in: *Le Mythe de l'Alchimie. Suivi de L'Alchimie asiatique* (Paris: L'Herne [Biblio Essais], 1990). This "short history" is also dealt with in his subchapter devoted to alchemy from Paracelsus to Newton, in *Histoire des croyances*, vol. 3, 266–72.

32. See the titles like *Patterns of Initiation* in note 30.

33. As, for instance, in Mircea Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris: Flammarion [Homo Sapiens], 1956) (new ed., 1977; English ed.: *The Forge and the Crucible* [London: Ridder, 1962]).

34. I would argue that the perennialist perspective is based upon three postulates: (1) There exists a primordial Tradition of nonhuman origin—humanity has not invented it but received it—which was progressively lost, and of which the various historical traditions and metaphysics are the *membra disjecta*. (2) Modern Western culture, science and civilization are inherently incompatible with "Tradition." Never before has humanity been alienated from the latter as seriously as today. (3) The "Tradition" may be recovered, partially at least, by focusing on the common denominators of the various religions and metaphysical traditions, a research that cannot be neutral but requires the seeker to embrace the "traditional" values and perspectives (a historicist perspective is incompatible with "Tradition"). For a cogent synthetical presentation of perennialism, see under the subtitle "Traditionalism/Perennialism," 1132–35, in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Tradition," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1125–35. For more detailed presentations, see, for example, William W. Quinn, *The Only Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); and Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

35. Guénon himself regarded negatively what he called "hermeticism," by which he meant most MWEC.

Perennialism was the subject of many statements by Eliade from the 1920s to practically the end of his life. In a 1979 interview, he said he "read Guénon rather late," with great interest, but was "irritated by his polemical aspect and his brutal rejection of modern Western culture.[36] In "The Occult in the Modern World," he devotes more attention to Guénon than to anyone else—without either endorsing or criticizing his views.[37] Eliade's longest and most explicit text on perennialism seems to be his article of 1979, "Some Notes on *Theosophia perennnis*: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Henry Corbin,"[38] although therein he states that he does not intend to "examine here the *philosophia perennis*, nor the problem of the tradition." He praises Coomaraswamy and Corbin for developing—contrary to Guénon or other contemporary "esotericists"—an exegesis that does not discard the academic tools of scholarship.[39]

There are quite a few statements to be found in Eliade's writings about perennialism and perennialists; when browsing through his works, we find his position regarding this worldview and its representatives to be rather inconsistent and scattered. They exerted on him, over many years, a certain attraction. But this is not the place to develop this vexed subject any further, since cogent studies have already been devoted to it by Enrico Montanari, Claudio Mutti, Paola Pisi, and Natale Spineto.[40]

## Reasons for Eliade's Preferences

From this brief survey (which does not claim to be exhaustive), it emerges that whereas Eliade highlights some of the MWEC, he deals less with others, and

36. Eliade and Rocquet, *L'epreuve du labyrinthe*, 170.

37. Eliade, "The Occult in the Modern World," in *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions*, 65–67.

38. Mircea Eliade, "Some Notes on *Theosophia perennnis*: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Henry Corbin," *History of Religions* 19, no. 2 (1979): 167–76' translated as "Ananda K. Coomaraswamy et Henry Corbin: à propos de la *Theosophia perennis*," in Mircea Eliade, *Briser le toit de la maison: La créativité et ses symboles* (Paris: Gallimard [Les Essais CCXXIX], 1986), 281–94.

39. Eliade, "Ananda K. Coomaraswamy et Henry Corbin," 284.

40. Enrico Montanari, "Eliade e Guénon," *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 61 (1995): 131–49; Claudio Mutti, *Eliade, Vâlsan, Geticus e gli altri: La fortuna di Guénon tra i romeni* (Parma: Edizioni all'insegna del Veltro, 1999); Paola Pisi, "I 'tradizionalisti' e la formazione del pensiero di Eliade," in Arcella, Pisi, and Scagno, *Confronto con Mircea Eliade*, 43–133; Natale Spineto, "Mircea Eliade and Traditionalism," *ries: The Journal for the Study of Esotericism* 1, no. 1 (2001): 62–87. See also some interesting information in Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 110–17. I would agree with Sedgwick when he writes: "Eliade's general model of human religiosity is in effect the Perennial Philosophy dressed up in secular clothes. Once assembled, a general model of human religiosity would differ little from the Perennial Philosophy. What Eliade did over his entire career was to pursue the standard Traditionalist research project of 'reassembl[ing] . . . debris' under other names and by more scholarly methods. His subject material was much the same as that found in *Etudes traditionnelles*, but instead of calling it 'tradition' he calls it 'archaic religion'" (112–13).

leaves still others entirely in the dark. His preferences in this matter may be, to some extent, due to the fact that these MWEC are not really, by nature, congenial to the essentials of his religious anthropology, particularly in view of the two notions that prevail in this anthropology: the "sacred" and the "renovatio."

The sacred according to Eliade is a "given" which exists per se, beyond all particular religious phenomena, ingrained as it is within the human mind. It manifests itself through hierophanies, which "just happen," independent of the human will, and are supposed to be recognized as such when they do so. The components of the sacred are a "Force" and a "Light." Nature is sacred in that it is replete with these two entities.[41] As already remarked,[42] this notion of the sacred is not so much Greek as a form of paganism, which brings to mind certain aspects of rural views and practices located mostly in central Europe. Be that as it may, the notion serves Eliade in his criticism of Judeo-Christianity, which he says has brought about a desacralization of nature,[43] thereby downplaying its importance.

Now, granted that this view holds true, to a certain extent, with regard to some mainstream established Christian religions, the reproach is ill founded with regard to Christianity considered in its historical entirety. One should not be oblivious to the fact, indeed, that nature is very present in major trends of medieval theology—and also in most MWEC, particularly in the Christian theosophical current (almost ignored in Eliade's work, as noted earlier). Operating within the various expressions of this current and of related ones is a mythical narrative in which nature is a network of correspondences, and of "signatures" that have to be deciphered. She is also a dramatis persona (along with God, the divine world, and man) in a cosmic drama whose metahistorical origin is the original Fall (of Lucifer and Adam).

Why does Eliade underplay such "esoteric" discourses in which nature is not at all "desacralized"? Was it because he seems to be more prone to deal with pagan forms of religiosity than with those of Christianity? It is, moreover, surprising that an author who laments the desacralization of nature has proved to be so close to the perennialist current, whose representatives, with very few exceptions (like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for instance), were far from granting nature any kind of "sacred" dimension. René Guénon, one of its first mainstays,

41. See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Paris: Payot, 1949), 40, 46, 49.

42. For example, subchapter 4, "Le Neo-paganisme de l'homo religiosus," in Daniel Dubuisson, *Mythologies du xxème siècle (Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade)* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1993), 277–88; Antoine Faivre, "L'ambiguità della nozione di sacro in Mircea Eliade," in *Confronto con Mircea Eliade*, 369.

43. See, for example, Mircea Eliade, "La permanence du sacré dans l'art contemporain" (written in 1964), in *Briser le toit de la maison*, 28–29; for more examples, see Daniel Dubuisson, *Mythologies du xxème siècle (Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade)*, n273.

repeatedly stated that the world of manifestation (i.e., the cosmos, nature itself) has even less reality than our shadow projected onto a wall.

The "renovatio" of man and nature—also one of Eliade's most cherished themes—is of course a constitutive element in a great many ontological myths, not least those present within various MWEC. For him, such myths are primarily the metahistorical narratives of a loss: the *anthropos* does not really feel "at home" in this world—he is a "displaced person" in a nature that is not (or is no longer) what it should be or should have remained. Hence the necessity of a renewal, in the sense of "new birth," through rites, initiations, and practices based on those myths. Hence also Eliade's interest in alchemy understood in its spiritual, not just material, aspects.

Thus understood, "renovatio" might, at first glance, seem to tally with the views spread within the MWEC, which indeed stress a similar notion (here, oftentimes called "reintegration"). Eliade's works are replete with examples of "initiatory journeys," which he presents as examples of ways of "renovatio." But somewhat surprisingly, despite his strong emphasis on the importance of the ontological myths in the history of religions, he does not evince much interest in the major ones present in the MWEC, particularly in those that have been so prevalent within some of these currents (in particular, the myth of the Fall of Lucifer, of Adam, and of nature itself, a myth that also tells us about a possible "reintegration" of man and of nature).

The reason Eliade bypasses this aspect is perhaps that, here, "reintegration" is not necessarily linked to the notion of "initiation" (so prevalent in his writings)—in the sense of a participation in collective rituals—but rather to the practice of some forms of "illuminating" speculations (supported by the "magical imagination," which is a major trait of the MWEC). Admittedly, although since the middle of the eighteenth century there have been many "initiatic" societies based on such myths, nonetheless the bulk of the literature produced by the MWEC does not bear on "initiation." Furthermore, considering Eliade's interest in rituals of initiation, it comes as a surprise that those initiatic rituals that constitute a part of some MWEC are almost absent from his work.[44] Even when dealing with the history of Western alchemy, and rightly reminding us that many of its representatives aimed at transforming the solitary adept himself, Eliade focuses on the idea of the adept's "renovatio" by way of "initiation" rather than on his "transmutatio"—although the notion of "initiation" may appear too general for approaching the specificity of the alchemical work.

44. Martines de Pasqually's theurgical ritual of initiation, for instance, is only alluded to in passing.

The notions of the sacred, hierophanies, and "renovatio" in the Eliadean sense would not prove to be very useful tools for the scholar dealing with the MWEC, because these notions hardly pertain to their corpus, in which the emphasis is rather put on a form of intellectual speculation or "gnosis," and on the idea of a nature that hardly fits into the cosmic religiosity that is a hallmark of Eliade's system. Although the traditionalist/perennialist movement is certainly not devoid of a form of "gnosis," the fact that it is not at all "Western-oriented" or "nature-oriented" might well—along with its "universalizing" program—account for his strong and lasting interest in it.

In sum, the place that the MWEC proportionally take in his works might be compared to that which they take in Dr. Zerlindi's library: he treated them as an aside. But this does not necessarily mean that he underestimated them or, for that matter, that he was not personally interested in them. Partly due to the fact that they mainly consist in a series of speculative discourses—in a "corpus of books," as it were—permeated by a sense of historicity, they were uncongenial to the program of transhistorical religious anthropology that he had set himself to develop.

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# 8

# The Camouflaged Sacred in Mircea Eliade's Self-Perception, Literature, and Scholarship

*Moshe Idel*

This theme constitutes the key to all the writings of my maturity.
—M. Eliade, *Autobiography*

## Mircea Eliade's Three Main Literary Corpora

The present essay deals with an aspect of Mircea Eliade's opus, the camouflage of the sacred, a principle that informs his creative imagination as it emerges from his written documents. Our discussions will have little to do with Eliade as a person or as a political man, despite the content of some of the quotes that follow. This restriction, however, does not make the task much easier, since there is hardly a modern scholar of the humanities in the last generation who wrote so much and in so many literary genres as Mircea Eliade did. Academic studies of many types—monographs, editions, commentaries, numerous detailed and specific studies, a history of religious ideas and an encyclopedia—and he founded at least two journals about religion. Let me designate all these activities

Thanks are due to Dr. Leon Volovici from Hebrew University, Jerusalem, with whom I had the opportunity to discuss issues related to Mircea Eliade for some years.

as *academica*. Eliade published several novels, a huge number of short stories, as well as some plays, and let me refer to these writings as his *literaria*. Before World War II he had an extensive journalistic career. Several books include interviews with him, one that consists of lectures he delivered at the Romanian radio in the late thirties. On a more personal level, he left a huge correspondence and kept memoirs and wrote an autobiography, all of which may be designated as *personalia*. Three voluminous books compiled recently by Mircea Handoca constitute what is called his bio-bibliography. Indubitably Eliade's oeuvre as a whole is an extraordinary and audacious literary and academic enterprise. It seems as if he tried to compete with an idol of his youth, later to become one of his patrons (and still later his critic), the prolific historian Nicolae Iorga, about whom Eliade asserted that he was "the man who wrote more than anyone else."[1] The recent publication of several important volumes that contain unpublished materials by Eliade, previously neglected or unknown by scholars, adds much to his literary corpus and allows fresh perspectives on his life and thought.

Though the topics dealt with in those various types of writings are diverse—religious, political, historical, literary, or personal—we may find an underlying assumption quite early in several of them: that the sacred camouflages itself within the profane, and is therefore largely unrecognizable. In order to reach a higher form of existence, one must be able to recognize those revelations, which are sometimes expressed by signs. When this recognition takes place, initiated either by the human person or by the sacred, Eliade speaks about hierophany, in some cases qualified as kratophany, ontophany, and theophany. This is the main religious ethos of Eliade himself, of some of the protagonists of his literature, and finally of religion as the spiritual phenomenon that he envisioned as a scholar. Penetrating beneath the surface of "banal" existence in order to encounter the "real," understanding one's destiny, and teaching others to decode this imperative are, according to him, the noblest of human enterprises. The worldview of the scholar coincides, therefore, with the manner in which he understands his life, his vision of the academic field he studies, and the deep structure of his literary writings. Though the unrecognizability and the camouflage are tightly connected, it is only some aspects of camouflage that will concern us here,[2] particularly the history of this aspect of Eliade's theory of

1. See the essay with this title written in Portuguese in 1944, and translated into Romanian in *Jurnalul Portughez si alte scrieri*, vol. 2, ed. Sorin Alexandrescu, trans. Mihai Zamfir (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 359–68. Though Iorga wrote even more than Eliade did, the latter uses a much greater variety of genres in his writings and is incomparably more studied by scholars than Iorga is.

2. Let me specify from the very beginning that my analysis in the following resorts to the term "camouflage" only when it occurs explicitly in Eliade's own writings, but not to the metaphoric uses that some scholars,

the sacred, and its occurrence on three planes related to Eliade, rather than a conceptual exposition or critique of it.

Let me start with a methodological observation. I shall use material found in diverse types of literatures, as mentioned earlier. One may well object to mixing together journals, correspondences, fantastic literature, and academic analysis in order to draw any conclusion. In principle, this is quite a plausible argument, but it runs against the manner in which Mircea Eliade himself wanted to be understood. He explicitly and repeatedly required an understanding of his opus as a unified corpus.[3] There are also other good reasons to do this: his *personalia* contain invaluable details for understanding the genesis of his literary writings and even some important commentaries on them by their author. His correspondence includes innumerable details about his academic relations with several major scholars of religion and can contribute much to the understanding of his career and plans.

Moreover, as we will see in the first citation here, sometimes the personal, the literary, and the academic overlap and are discussed in the very same passage. In such a case, a separation between the three planes of discussion is hardly reasonable. I shall attempt, therefore, to point out the need to be aware of this triple intertwined relation, rather than the connections only between two—the *literaria* and the *academica*. In fact, his *literaria* is quite autobiographic and so replete with discussions about the nature of religion that it is hard to detach either the *personalia* or the *academica* from its interpretation.[4] This is also the nature of Eliade's *personalia*, which is replete with references to both his *literaria* and his *academica*. For example, Eliade confesses that his experiences when practicing yoga exercises are reflected in his book on Yoga.[5]

However, what is even more salient for our discussions here is an important remark that Eliade makes in his *Portuguese Journal*, where he asks rhetorically: "Should I be ashamed of the autobiographical substance of my entire

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such as Adriana Berger and Daniel Dubuisson, attribute to him, such as covering up his past. From my perspective here, such a metaphoric use may confuse arguments I will make. See Daniel Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe siecle: Dumezil, Levi-Strauss, Eliade* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1993). I use the enlarged Romanian version, *Mitologii*, trans. Lucian Dinescu (Iasi: Polirom, 2003), 213, 285, 293n105.

3. See Gheorghe Glodeanu, *Coordinateale imaginarului in opera lui Mircea Eliade* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2001), 96–97. This approach has been adopted also by Wendy Doniger, "Time, Sleep, and Death in the Life, Fiction, and Academic Writings of Mircea Eliade," in *Mircea Elliade e le religioni asiatiche*, ed. Gherardo Gnoli (Roma: Istituto Italiano per Ii medio ed estremo Oriente, 1989), 1–21.

4. See, e.g., the passage about Vishnu and Narada, dealing with the concept of maya, found in Eliade, *Noapte de Sinziene* (Bucharest: Univers Encyclopedic, 1999), 399, but dealt with academically in Eliade, *Images and Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 70–71.

5. Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, *1907–1937*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 189–90.

opus?"[6] which is both an interesting and a crucial lead for my approach in this study. Though all literary writings and even scholarship depend, to a certain extent, on events in the life of the writer or the scholar, it is only rarely, as we shall see later, that a hermeneutics of one's life may inspire patterns that characterize basic subjects in scholarship. The strong affinities between, on the one hand, the experiences of Eliade's youth and the manner in which he understood them and, on the other, his literature and academic works, seem to me major factors in Eliade's development, which have not been taken sufficiently into consideration. This essay is an attempt to illustrate the possibilities inherent in a study based on such a presupposition.

The problem posed by such an integrative approach is, however, the sheer amount of material, found in several languages, which can hardly be mastered by a single scholar. The immense amount of scholarship written on Eliade in the last generation complicates the problem even more, especially because polarized opinions about his past and scholarship are continuously growing. Florin Turcanu's huge, brilliant, and balanced contribution to understanding Eliade's biography and his diverse cultural backgrounds is extremely helpful, in both its details and its general approach, and let us hope that it will nourish much further serious research.[7] Another great problem in studying Eliade is posed by the numerous possible constructs inherent in the existence of such a huge corpus. This wealth allows a variety of combinations between data found in many sources, and different combinations may generate different meanings, even more so when the sources belong to different literary corpora.

## Three Intertwined Domains of Camouflage

Let me point out from the very beginning that many scholars have addressed, though succinctly, the importance of the role played by the theory of the "camouflage of the sacred" in Mircea Eliade's opus. As for the literary works, several literary critics have drawn attention to the importance of this approach: Matei Calinescu,[8] Virgil Ierunca,[9] Gheorghe Glodeanu,[10] and to a certain extent Eugen

6. Eliade, *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 297. In other instances Eliade calls for an interpretation of his oeuvre as a totality.

7. Florin Turcanu, *Mircea Eliade, Le prisonier de l'histoire* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2003).

8. See, e.g., Matei Calinescu, "Introduction: The Fantastic and Its Interpretation in Mircea Eliade's Later Novellas," in *Mircea Eliade, Youth without Youth and Other Novellas*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1988), xvixvii.

9. Virgil Ierunca, "L'oeuvre litteraire," in *Cahier de l'Herne, Mircea Eliade* (Paris: L'Herne, 1978), 222.

10. Glodeanu, *Coordinateale imaginarului*, 42–43, 45, 48–49, 51, 53–54, 235.

Simion.[11] In the scholarship of religion, the series of scholars who touched, or had dealt with, this concept is quite long, and I mention here only some of the names in the field: Adrian Marino,[12] Sergiu Al-George,[13] Ioan Petru Culianu,[14] Mac Linscott Ricketts,[15] Douglas Allen,[16] Jean-Jacques Wunenburger,[17] Carl Olson,[18] Bryan S. Rennie,[19] Daniel Dubuisson,[20] Wilhelm Danca,[21] Steven M. Wasserstrom,[22] Robert Lazu,[23] and more recently and quite extensively in the context of the camouflage of sacred time, Elvira Groza.[24] Nevertheless, those learned analyses deal with a relatively small selection of pertinent texts, and they engage only one of the two fields of Eliade's oeuvre, the *literaria* or the *academica*, but pay scarcely any attention to the importance of the *personalia*—and even less to the possible contribution of Eliade's self-understanding—for a better understanding of first two literary corpora.

Let me start with the most extensive and compact formulation of the theory of the comprehensive camouflage and adduce, to begin, a compact passage that seems to have been quite neglected in analyses of the topic. In the memoirs redacted in the sixties, Eliade comments upon his marriage to his first wife, Nina Mares, in January 1934:

> So far as I was concerned, banal existences attracted me. I said to myself that if the fantastic or the supernatural or the supra-historical

11. Eugen Simion, *Mircea Eliade, Nodurile si semnele prozei* (Iasi: Junimea, 2006), 209–10, 216–18.

12. Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1980), 158–59.

13. Sergiu Al-George, *Arhaic si Universal: India in Constiinta Culturala Romineasca* (Bucharest: Editura Herald, 1981), 160–65. An English version of the pertinent discussion is found in "India in the Cultural Destiny of Mircea Eliade," *Mankind Quarterly* 25, no. 1/2 (1984): 115–35.

14. Ioan Petru Culianu, *Mircea Eliade,* trans. Tr. Florin Chiritescu and Dan Petrescu (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998), 39–40, 252–53. This is a significantly expanded version of the Italian original.

15. Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots,* vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1209.

16. Douglas Allen, *Mircea Eliade et le phenomene religieuse*, trans. Constantin N. Grigoresco (Paris: Payot, 1982), 105–109; Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (New York: Garland, 1998), 87–92.

17. Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *Le Sacré* (Paris: PUF, 1990); cf. the Romanian translation of Mihaela Calus, *Sacrul* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2000), 89, and the translator's introduction, p. 31.

18. Carl Olson, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 38–39, 52–53, 59, 95, 162, 164, 169.

19. Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 215–18.

20. Dubuisson, *Mitologii*, 203, 233, 293n105, 276, 296.

21. Wilhelm Danca, *Mircea Eliade: Definitio Sacri* (Iasi: Ars Longa, 1998), 209–23. This monograph is a very valuable analysis of Eliade's theory of the sacred and contributes to a broader understanding of his sources, which cannot be summarized in this context.

22. Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 33–34, 42, 270–71n32.

23. Robert Lazu, "Dialectica Sacrului intre teologie si metafizica," in *Orizontul Sacru*, ed. Corneliu Mircea and Robert Lazu (Iasi: Polirom, 1998), 111–12.

24. Elvira Groza, *Fenomenalizarea Timpului in Conceptia Lui Mircea Eliade* (Cluj: Provopress, 2006), 191–217, 250–55.

> is somehow accessible to us, we cannot encounter it except camouflaged in the banal. Just as I believed in the unrecognizability of miracle, so I also believed in the necessity (of the dialectic order) of the camouflage of the "exceptional" in the banal, and of the transhistoric in historic events. These ideas, which I was to formulate later in *Sarpele* (published in 1937), *Noaptea de Sinziene* (*The Forbidden Forest*, written between 1949 to 1954),[25] and in several works of history and philosophy of religions, sustained me in the experiment that I had begun. Actually, when instead of returning to India I accepted a situation that inevitably led to marriage, I was consenting to do in Bucharest that which I knew I should be forced to do in Calcutta or Benares: namely to camouflage my "secret life" in an existence apparently dedicated to scientific research. But with this difference—that at this point a somewhat tragic element was introduced, my certainty that I understood my destiny, precisely because my marriage to Nina seemed, *apparently*, to be a disaster, it must, if I believed in the dialectics and mystery of camouflage, mean exactly the opposite.[26]

Two words serve as the leitmotif of this passage (and of some of our discussions to follow): "camouflage" and "banal." According to Eliade, the sacred, or the miraculous, needs a camouflage that will hide it. This resort to a military term that had been introduced during World War I is interesting, since it differs from the more standard theory of accommodation of the divine to lower planes of existence, or theories about the contraction of the unlimited divinity when it reveals itself. "Camouflage" as used by Eliade here intends to emphasize the fact that there is a matter of disguise involved. Only someone who is already acquainted, in some form or another, with the disguised form may recognize it. The "banal" is therefore hiding something that is dramatically different from it, by containing it within itself, in the case both of Nina and of Mircea.

Three distinct matters converge here: the personal, the literary, and the academic. Different as they are, they correspond, since all three cases express a more comprehensive, ontological situation. The specific incident of his decision to marry Nina serves as the starting point of a reflection that encompasses

25. Indeed, in this novel the concept of camouflage occurs many times, but the best parallel to our passage here is on p. 193.

26. Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 274–75, emphases in the original. There is some overlap between some parts of this passage and what Eliade says later on in the same book (p. 322); I shall return, in my later discussion, to some formulations not found in the passage just quoted.

immediately a much broader range of topics. The private case attracts a reflection on the general situation; the particular event is seen as integrated into a much larger series of individual events and into a more comprehensive understanding of reality.

The personal level constitutes the answer Eliade provides to the surprise of his family and friends at his decision to leave one of his two girlfriends, the demanding actress Sorana Topa, in order to marry the more modest Nina Mares.[27] What for others was hardly understandable was for Eliade a wise decision, taken because of his belief in the pervasiveness of camouflage. I assume that other people regarded the brighter and more prominent Sorana as a more appropriate consort for Eliade than Nina. It is not my concern here to elaborate upon the ways in which Eliade reflected upon the choice he made in this case: he claimed that he promised to himself and to Nina to recompense her for all the vicissitudes of her life before they met, and he resorts twice in this context to the term *restitutio ad integrum*.[28] However, ironically enough, in two instances in his writings he confesses that he asked her to have an abortion, since he did not want to have children at that stage,[29] and he even had the impression that this surgery might have caused her later, fatal illness.[30] Therefore, if Eliade contemplated his involvement with Nina according to the theory of camouflage, it seems that he relied on the camouflage theory quite early in his life, at the age of twenty-six, or even earlier, if we believe his references to what might have happened in Calcutta or Benares.

Much more important, however, is the reference to another form of camouflage mentioned in the passage: that of the "secret life" probably hidden "in an existence apparently dedicated to scientific research."[31] The camouflage is strengthened by the second occurrence of the adverb "apparently." In other words, the academic activity camouflages another activity, the secret life, whose purpose is higher than it and to a certain extent disguised by it. Just as the marriage to Nina is part of the *restitutio ad integrum* that transcends the ordinary forms of marriage (traditionally intended to procreation), so also the scientific research serves as pretext, occasion, or camouflage for a more sublime and

27. Ibid., 271–75.

28. Ibid., 272, 277.

29. Ibid., 277; Eliade, *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 274. See also Sorin Alexandrescu, *Mircea Eliade: Dinspre Portugalia* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 210–11.

30. Eliade, *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 274.

31. An issue that deserves a special investigation is the possibility that in a lost letter addressed by Eliade to Julius Evola, he might have implied that he intended to serve as "a Trojan horse" in the academy. This possibility was mentioned to me by Dr. Leon Volovici. However, given the fact that this implication is based on a formulation in a letter that Evola wrote at the end of 1951, in reply to a now lost letter from Eliade, caution is important. See Marin Mincu and Roberto Scagno, *Mircea Eliade e l'Italia* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1987), 253.

presumably different form of life. Formulated in the early sixties, when Eliade had already definitely chosen the academic life, this description of the status of academic research is quite exciting. If indeed the feelings he had about his marriage and his way of involvement in the academy extend so far back into the early thirties, then we have a long-standing confession about the way in which he envisioned all his most important activities: he enters a certain institution, marriage, or academy that he considers banal, in order to search there for something much more sublime.

What is the nature of this more sublime or "secret life"? According to another passage, Eliade confesses that his love for Nina and his adventure in the Iron Guard were a matter of his search for the Absolute.[32] This means that again Nina, namely, human love, and the Iron Guard, presumably representing for Eliade some form of spiritual religion, are conceived as paths for reaching the Absolute.[33] Or, to formulate the entire problem in a different manner: the manifestation of the transcendent needs the power of discernment of the human. The miracle is recognizable only to someone who expects or longs for that miracle. The attentive openness of the spiritual man is therefore necessary, since the sacred does not reveal itself in a manner that is manifest to everyone.

Let me draw attention to what is the most interesting aspect of the preceding passage: the confidence that Eliade himself found in a privileged position of discerning the uncommon nature of his future wife, in comparison to other people's different reactions. Neither his family nor his friends—with the exception of Mihail Sebastian[34]—are sensitive to the special character of his choice. This privileged status assumes some form of special providence that guides someone to make the right choices, which are hardly understood by others; we shall return to this point later on. Because the "others" belong to the banal life and judge events accordingly, the inverse of their opinion "must" be true, and Eliade stands therefore on the opposite side of their understanding of the world. The resort to the verb "must" is quite revealing. He assumes that by understanding the ordinary attitude, someone may extrapolate the inverse and thus reach some form of special insight. The hermeneutics of a certain situation is therefore a matter of the special individual, and hardly a matter of consensus.

32. Eliade, *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 293.

33. For the affinity between Nina and the Iron Guard, and her possible influence on Eliade, see Turcanu, *Le prisonier de l'histoire*, 264.

34. Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 275. Sebastian was probably well acquainted with Nina before Eliade fell in love with her, and he maintained fond feelings for her until her death. See the passages in Sebastian's journal, dealing with her death and reminiscences of her, in Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal 1935–1944*, ed. Gabriela Omat, preface by Leon Volovici (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 572; see also p. 175; Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 241; as well as the coda to this chapter.

However, it should be emphasized that this aptitude not only applies to his private life or his literary writings but became, according to a sentence in the passage just cited, the basis of what is found "in several works of history and philosophy of religions" of Eliade's. This claim is the main reason for my dwelling upon the importance of this text: it provides Eliade's self-awareness that a common denominator unifies the three main levels of his life: the private, the literary, and the academic. The underlying assumption can be formulated as follows: the principle that holds for understanding his *literaria* is also salient for understanding his "history and philosophy" in the academic field of religion, and also for fathoming the meaning of at least some events of his life.

The passage cited earlier describes deliberations concerning events that took place in late 1933 or very early 1934 (January), the time when Eliade married Nina. The autobiography, however, was written many decades after the event, and it may be, for a skeptical reader, hazardous to attribute to those early years the emergence of the theory of the sacred as camouflaged. However, in my opinion, the early date for Eliade's embracing of this vision of the sacred is quite plausible, for two different reasons. In an interview he gave in October 1981 to Mircea Handoca, he mentions a play he did not finish, entitled *The Death Comedy* (*Comedia Mortii*), which he had begun to write in 1931 in India. Eliade reminiscences that "what seems to me interesting now, half a century later, is the fact that in that play I have anticipated the technique of the fantastic novels which I wrote in the last thirty years, and even the concept of 'the camouflage of the sacred within the profane,' which guided my research in the study of religions."[35]

Thus, the Hindu background for the emergence of the theory of the camouflage of the sacred, and the assumption that the camouflage theory guided his academic studies of religion, is quite evident; we shall see more of this later. In other words, the clue for understanding what Eliade depicts as a guiding concept of his study of religion, "the camouflage," is found in a work that he forged at the early age of twenty-four, a literary work, the unfinished play. The second piece of evidence is found in a discussion in a collection of essays published in 1934 under the title *Oceanografia*. There the theory of camouflage is not explicit, but that of "the unrecognizability of the sacred" is quite recognizable: "Unrecognizability is the perfect form for a divine revelation, since the divinity does not manifest itself by the way of contrast[36] but operates directly in

35. Mircea Handoca, *Convorbiri cu si despre Mircea Eliade* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), 11–12 (my translation).

36. From the context this form of revelation is characteristic of ancient religions, while the contact represents the Christian type of revelation. See also Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 171.

humanity by the way of contact, coming together."[37] Conspicuous in this passage is the presupposition that unrecognizability is a matter of an ontological manifestation. The manner in which the sacred manifests itself may be related to its recognition by a religious person, but it has an objective status. In this context, Eliade states that the perception or conception of the mystery does not coincide with the mystery itself.[38] We may indeed regard Eliade's approach as a "mystery" without theology.[39]

Let me turn now to a somewhat later reverberation of the ideas in the first passage quoted here, found, again, in the first volume of Eliade's *Autobiography*:

> When I received the galley proofs,[40] I could scarcely believe my eyes. . . . *Sarpele* was written as I had "seen" it from the beginning: a story with banal characters. . . . It is as if the everyday world camouflages a secret dimension which, once man knows it, reveals to him simultaneously the profound significance of the Cosmos and his authentic mode of being: a mode of perfect, beatific spontaneity, but which is neither the irresponsibility of the animal existence nor angelic beatitude. Unconsciously and unintentionally, I succeeded in "showing" in *Sarpele* something I was to develop later in my works of philosophy and history of religions: namely that the "sacred" *apparently* is not different from the "profane," that the "fantastic" is camouflaged in the "real," that the world is what it shows itself to be, and is at the same time a cipher.[41] . . . The same dialectic . . . also sustains *The Forbidden Forest* . . . with the difference that at this time no longer was it a question of the profound meaning of the Cosmos, but of the "cipher" of historical events. The theme of the "fantastic"

37. Mircea Eliade, *Oceanografie* (Bucharest: Editura Poporului, 1934), 70. For an English translation of the context of this quote, see *Imagination and Meaning: The Scholarly and Literary Worlds of Mircea Eliade*, ed. Norman J. Girardot and Mac Linscott Ricketts (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 182. This is quite a triumphalist vision of Christianity. The first to point out the importance of this passage for the history of Eliade's theory of unrecognizability was Danca, *Mircea Eliade: Definitio Sacri*, 217. For the superiority of the Christian theophany according to Eliade, see Groza, *Fenomenalizarea timpului*, 154–55; and Paul M. McKowen, "The Christology of Mircea Eliade," in *Homo Religiosus, to Honor Mircea Eliade*, ed. L. M Arcade, Ion Manea, and Elena Stamatescu (Los Angeles: Mircea Eliade Research Institute, 1990), 184–91.

38. Eliade, *Oceanografie*, 69–70, translated in *Imagination and Meaning*, 181–83.

39. I have adopted this phrase from Bruno Pinchard, who used it in another context: *Meditations mythologiques* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002), 91–96.

40. This refers to his short story "The Snake," which was written in hurry, without even consulting the earlier parts that had already been sent to the typist.

41. Compare, however, the quite different assumption of Eliade about another short story of his, "With the Gipsy Girls," which he wants people to read not as a cipher but as containing a message about a different reality that is created in the literary work itself. See Mircea Eliade, *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957–1969* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 307–8.

> camouflaged in the everyday occurrences is found again in several of my novellas written still more recently, for example *La Tiganci* . . . and *Podul*. In a certain sense, one could say that this theme constitutes the key to all the writings of my maturity.[42]

In the context of this passage, Eliade describes finding out, as a surprise, the meaning of the story in which the camouflaged message is encoded, apparently without being aware that he intended to do so. As he confesses in the passage immediately preceding this quote, the short story was written at night. This is doubtless part of what Eliade called his nocturnal mode, which differs from the diurnal, scientific, or critical one.[43]

A similar surprise is also evident in the previously mentioned interview with Mircea Handoca, as well as in another similar instance, when he writes: "Dumfounded over the 'discoveries' that I am making about my novels: *Isabelle* and *La Lumiere qui s'eteint*."[44] Those astonishing "discoveries" have to do with both the religious conceptual content of his novels, which were not as clear to the author himself before he wrote them, and the autobiographical meaning.[45] The concept of deciphering, as applied to what has been called the "mystery" of Eliade's life and destiny, also occurs in another important instance in the early stages of his life.[46] From this point of view, there is no difference between his interpretation of the various mysterious stages of his life, the hidden messages unintentionally harbored by his novels, and religious documents written by another person. Something secret is found there that requires a special type of hermeneutics. However, unlike the tone of the passage in the *Oceanografia*, where the ontological camouflage is evident, in the last quote Eliade resorts to the expression "as if," which demands a less ontological understanding.

Perhaps the strongest expression of Eliade's preoccupation with the theory of the camouflaged sacred is found in his *Journal*, in two consecutive notes in March 1976 about rereading his earlier autobiographical notes:

42. Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 321–22. On this passage see also Allen, *Myth and Religion*, 88. See also the interesting parallel found in an autobiographical fragment of 1953, translated in *Imagination and Meaning*, 123–24. It should be mentioned that in one of his latest short stories, "Under the Shadow of a Lily," the issue of "banal" and "camouflage" plays a major role. See Mircea Eliade, *Nuvele Inedite*, ed. Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Rum-Irina, 1991), 122, 124, 135.

43. See David Carrasco and Jane Marie Law, eds., *Waiting for the Dawn: Mircea Eliade in Perspective* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 19–20. See also Eliade's confession of his attraction to night in *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 257–58. Eliade believed in the affinities between the sacred, myths, art and literature, and oneiric states of mind. See Allen, *Myth and Religion*, 181, 272, 278, 281; Eliade's *Journal*, on November 3, 1949; and Mac Linscott Ricketts, "Mircea Eliade and the Writing of the Forbidden Forest," in *Imagination and Meaning*, 105–6.

44. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 184.

45. See later in the chapter for another quote from this page.

46. See Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 153. For more on Eliade's spiritual journey, see Rodney L. Taylor, "Mircea Eliade: The Self and the Journey," in Carrasco and Marie Law, *Waiting for the Dawn*, 131–33.

> While rereading what I wrote I go from discovery to discovery. Why did I stress—but differently, and with extreme passion—the subjects that I had, however, dealt with abundantly both in my journal and in other writings? The mystery of the dialectic of the camouflaging of the sacred in the profane, for example. One would think that this is a subject that preoccupies me to the point of obsession. Not content to confront the issue in my works on the history of religions and in my literary writings of the last few years, I must still grapple with it in what I note for myself alone! . . . The fervor with which I rework to better develop reflections inspired by the camouflaging of the sacred in the profane must have a deeper meaning, and I'm just beginning to have an inkling of it. This dialectic of camouflaging is infinitely more vast and goes much farther than all that I've been able to say about it up until now. The "mystery of the camouflage"[47] is fundamental to an entire metaphysics, for it is the very mystery of the human condition. If it obsesses me so much, it is because I don't decide to go into it in more depth, to make a systematic presentation of it, to study it from its own unique perspective, that of philosophical meditation.[48]

I cannot imagine a more powerful recognition of the centrality of the camouflage theory than these two passages, and the term "obsession" that Eliade uses twice. For this theme was not only a guiding theory from his youth but become obsessive for him in his elderly years. In any case, Ioan P. Culianu summarized well the importance of the camouflage theme when he wrote: "For Eliade the world was a camouflage through which more profound signs transpired."[49]

## The Camouflage: A Hindu-Christian Synthesis

In an excellent analysis of some of Eliade's discussions of the camouflage of the sacred, the Romanian indologist Sergiu Al-George has pointed out the affinities

47. The English translation here has "mask," but the Romanian original has "misterul camuflajului." See Eliade, *Jurnalul*, vol. 2, ed. Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 222.

48. Mircea Eliade, *Journal*, vol. 3, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 220–21. See also ibid., 135–36, 227–28. Eliade did not leave any sustained reflection on the topic in the last decade of his life.

49. Ioan Petru Culianu, *Pacatul Impotriva Spiritului* (Iasi: Polirom, 2005), 131. On "signs," see more in the coda.

between it and the Hindu concept of maya.[50] This proposal is quite plausible. We have already encountered one more reason for such a connection, the unfinished play that he began in India, and we shall see in the next section, in a quote from the short story "The Bridge," a clear connection between the two that Eliade himself made explicitly. A reading of most of Eliade's texts about camouflage may leave the impression that we are dealing with either a personal or a transhistorical kind of camouflage. But in another passage, Eliade claims that the camouflage of the divine has a history, within the history of religion. In *No Souvenirs*, he reports a discussion he had with a reader of his short story, again in the context of "The Snake":

> my theory that, after the Incarnation, the transcendent is camouflaged in the world or in history and thus becomes "incognizable." In *The Snake* a banal atmosphere and mediocre characters are gradually transfigured. But what came from "beyond," as well as all the paradisiac images of the end of the story, were already there from the beginning, but camouflaged by the banality of everyday life and, as such, unrecognizable.[51]

Here the resort to the concept of camouflage in literature is again put in direct relation to a theory in the history of religion. Eliade does not assume that his theory holds in the cases of all religions, but only for postincarnational religious events. The Christian doctrine of Incarnation deals not with a specific event in the story of a certain religion but with a sharp ontological shift, after which only smaller manifestations are possible. This historical event seems to be less a Hindu than a Christian vision of the development of religion, as we also learn from another passage:

> The history of religions—from the most primitive to the most highly developed—is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities. From the most elementary hierophany—e.g., manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object, a stone or a tree—to the supreme hierophany (which, for a Christian, is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ) there is no solution of continuity. In each case we are confronted by the same

50. Al-George, *Arhaic si Universal*, 160–65. For other important references to Eliade's Hindu background, see also Danca, *Mircea Eliade, Definitio Sacri*, 193–98, 209–16; Guilford Dudley III, *Religion on Trial, Mircea Eliade and His Critics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), 105–18; and Aldo Natale Terrin, "L'Ame orientale dans la methodologie et dans la pensée historique de Mircea Eliade," in *Deux explorateurs de la pensée humaine, George Dumézil et Mircea Eliade*, ed. Jules Ries and Natale Spineto (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 263–88. See also the more general observation of Eliade himself in his *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 203.

51. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 191.

> mysterious act—the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural "profane" world.[52]

Here, the Hindu theory of maya as manifestation is conflated with the Christian vision of the special status of the Incarnation as revelation,[53] which follow a certain pattern found already in *Oceanografie*.[54] Eliade distinguishes between the "primitive" and "supreme" manifestations of the sacred. The more diffuse forms of hierophanies before the Incarnation, the gods, were restricted to a hierophany camouflaged in a human person. It should be pointed out that in *Oceanografie*, as in the last quote—though more emphatically—the Christian type of miracle, which is unrecognizable, is conceived to be higher than anything before it.[55] A further stage of camouflage occurs in what Eliade calls the Judeo-Christian tradition:

> It is only through the discovery of History—more precisely by the awakening of the historical consciousness in Judaeo-Christianity and its propagation by Hegel and his successors—it is only through the radical assimilation of the new mode of being represented by human existence in the world that myth could be left behind. But we hesitate to say that mythical thought has been abolished. As we shall soon see, it managed to survive, though radically changed (if not perfectly camouflaged). And the astonishing fact is that, more than anywhere else it survives in historiography.[56]

An interesting formulation of this theory, which includes a term that is important in our context, is found in a parallel to this quote in *No Souvenirs*: "I came to understand that modern science would not have been possible without the Judeo-Christian tradition, which emptied the cosmos of the sacred, and thus neutralized and banalized it."[57] Here the "banal," a term that has been used

52. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 11. The concept of camouflage plays only a marginal role in this book. See pp. 186 and 187 for short discussions of the camouflage of myths in literature. This passage assumes that hierophanies are objective events, and not a matter of hermeneutics. See also ibid., 12.

53. See also Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: World, 1963), 30n1. It is surprising that in this first substantial survey by Eliade of the morphology of the sacred, the concept of camouflage of the sacred is absent.

54. Eliade, *Oceanografie*, 70.

55. Ibid. This is also the case in the formulation found much later in Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, 124.

56. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 113; see also Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 112.

57. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 71 (1959). For an interesting parallel to this claim that "I came to understand," see the view of Julius Evola, with whom Eliade was in close contact, as adduced by Dubuisson, *Mitologii*, 292n81. See also there p. 293n98.

several times in the context of camouflage, is used in a more comprehensive context.

In a way, Eliade sees himself as retrieving the situation before the emergence of the vacuum allegedly created by the Judeo-Christian tradition, which "banalized" the world.[58] Just as he was able to understand the unique and sacred hidden in Nina, so was he also capable of creating heroes who seek and sometime meet the camouflaged sacred, and of restoring the sacred that he believed to have vanished in the West.[59]

## Camouflage, Maya, and Women

The most outstanding discussion of the camouflage, which sheds some light on the origins of this theory, is found in a short and quite enigmatic story entitled "Podul" ("The Bridge"), which includes some themes relevant for our topic. One rather lengthy reflection did not, to my best knowledge, attract from most of the scholars who dealt with this topic the attention it merited:

> Sometimes, in the case of some persons the profound structures of reality are revealed under the aspect of the most stringent banality. Structures that otherwise, to speak rationally, are inaccessible to us.[60] . . . However, ultimate reality cannot be grasped in concepts

58. I wonder whether Eliade was acquainted with eighteenth-century Hasidism, widespread since 1800 in some provinces in north Romania, including some places in the Carpathian Mountains, a mystical revivalist movement that reenchanted the natural world by spreading some form of pantheistic thought, which sacralized human behavior. I find quite problematic the entire scholarly tradition that resorts to the syntagm "Judeo-Christian" as a homogeneous entity over two millennia, especially because Eliade is so eager to distinguish within Christianity a separate entity that he designates as cosmic Christianity, which survived in the same Carpathian Mountains. See also Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 164, 168–69. Eliade misses the entire Muslim tradition in many of these contexts. On reenchantment in Hasidism, see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 220–21. On early Hasidism as betraying Shamanic features see ibid., 214, 218, and Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines and Ladders* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 143–66, especially 148–50 for a comparison between a Hasidic passage and an instance of shamanism in the Carpathian Mountains. I am confident that Eliade would have welcomed such a comparative approach, but his ignorance of what happened among Jews in the Carpathians is intriguing.

59. The vision of a homogeneous West is hardly comprehensible, given his strong reading of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In a way, Eliade was a Hegelian thinker, since he attributes to some developments, like the Jewish discovery of history and the exclusive adoption of linear time, the Christian Incarnation, or the impact of Hegel, too great an impact on large-scale groups. Those dramatic shifts added new theories to old ones that continued to have their impact also later on. See, e.g., the importance of the theory of cyclical time in biblical and postbiblical forms of Judaism, in my essay "Some Concepts of Time and History in Kabbalah," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. E. Carlebach, J. M. Efron, and D. N. Myers (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 153–88.

60. I omit here a discussion of the negative role of language in Western thought, to which I hope to return elsewhere.

> nor expressed in language. For our mind, the ultimate reality, being, is a mystery, as I define mystery: that which we cannot recognize, which is unrecognizable. This may mean, however, two things: either that we cannot ever know ultimate reality or that we can know it at any time, on the condition that we learn to recognize it under its infinite *camouflages in appearances*, what we call immediate reality,[61] within what the Hindus call maya, a term that I would translate as the immediate *unreality*. You understand what I allude to: incidents, events, fortuitous encounters, what appears to have no significance. I say appears. But what if reality is only a pit created by maya, the cosmic witch, matter in its becoming? This is the reason why we speak about *coincidentia oppositorum*,[62] about that mystery in which being may coincide with nonbeing. I repeat: *may* coincide. But they do not always coincide, since if they would coincide it would no longer be a mystery. . . . When I understood that atman is identical to brahman, the lieutenant understood that he died for the world, that he awoke suddenly detached from everything, and though this death meant his freedom, he was what the Hindus call "one who is dead in life,"[63] and—as happens in such limit-cases—sometimes one feels alive, but sometimes, dead.[64]

First, it is important to pay attention to the assumption that not only events but also banal persons may sometimes be portents of the mysterious presence of the sacred. Just as in the case of his description of Nina Mares, here too an apparently banal person is potentially the host of a higher mystery. This seems also to be the case of a much earlier literary figure, the librarian Cesare, the main protagonist of *The Light That Fails*, one of Eliade's earliest novels, conceived and written in 1930 in India, or of the much later Stefan, the protagonist of his most important novel, *The Forbidden Forest*.[65] In both cases, it is easy to see parallels between the literary protagonist and the life of Eliade himself though neither Cesare nor Stefan was just a full representative of the author. A banal individual who incarnates a mystery is the most common way that the sacred reveals itself. Unlike the "heroic" nature of the founders of the world

61. On the concept of "immediate realities," see also Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 177.

62. On this pattern, which is very important in Eliade's phenomenology of religion, see, e.g., Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 419–20; and Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 67–82.

63. On this concept, see his short survey in Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, published in 1939 and reprinted in *Drumul spre Centru*, ed. Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Plesu (Bucharest: Univers, 1991), 126–27.

64. Eliade, *Podul*, in Mircea Eliade, *In Curte la Dionis* (Bucharest: Cartyea Romaneasca, 1981), 197–98 (my translation). See also Glodeanu, *Coordinate ale imaginarului*, 102–3.

65. See below in Coda.

religions, it is the more discreet, modest, hardly recognizable hidden nature of a person that, for Eliade, transforms him into a candidate for mystery to dwell in.[66] Trivial events and encounters, too, may be harbingers of sublime messages. For the trivial and the sublime sometimes coincide, and the act of pinpointing these instances constitutes the discovery of the mystery.

What is conspicuous in this seminal passage is the strong claim that the camouflage theory is related to the Hindu concept of maya, understood as both revealing and concealing something deep in the structure of reality. What in some other cases is presented as his theory, unrelated to any specific religion, but dealing with the nature of the sacred, is here explicitly traced to three major concepts in Hinduism. Interesting in this context is the expression "camouflaged optimism" that Eliade attributes to Indian spirituality.[67]

Let me turn to another discussion of maya, this time directly related to Eliade's early life. In both his *Autobiography* and *No Souvenirs*, he describes his reaction to the warning a hermit gave him about his affair with Jenny Isaac in the ashram in Rishikesh:

> For a second time in less than a year I had let myself be deceived by my own imagination—in Indian terms, by illusions created by maya. Just now, when it seemed to me that I had "awakened," I had fallen prey to the first magical temptation that an unceasing maya had produced in my path. . . . Once again a young woman had embodied a secret that I had not known how to decipher. . . . I could not know it then, but eternal maya, in her blind wisdom, had set those two girls on my path in order to help me find my true destiny. Neither the life of an "adopted Bengali" nor that of a Himalayan hermit would have allowed me to fulfill the possibilities with which I had come into the world.[68]

Therefore, Jenny and his relationship with her, as with Maitreyi Dasgupta some months beforehand, embody a secret that Eliade was supposed to be able to decode but failed to do so. This confession of failure is nevertheless a *felix culpa*. Other discussions view his failure to decode the message as part of a much bigger scheme concerning his mission, namely, to cause him to leave the

66. See especially Eliade's totally unheroic description of Jesus in the *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 273–74, and its reverberation in his *Images and Symbols*, 170. Eliade ignores the entire scholarly literature and primary texts dealing with the extraordinary biography of the founders of religion, such as Lord Raglan's *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover, 2003).

67. Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 190.

68. Ibid., 199. See also Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 188–89, where again maya is invoked in the context of Eliade's two girlfriends.

ashram, or transhistorical India, just as his erotic involvement with Maitreyi was intended by the same maya to cause him to disentangle himself from historical India, Bengali society. The magical power of maya here concerns the destiny of Romanian culture more than Hindu culture.

The feeling that he has been privileged even when he has seemed to fail has to do with Eliade's self-understanding that he had a mission to accomplish. This mission involves, in another case, the need to separate from yet another woman, Nina. Reflecting on her death, which he regretted terribly, he nevertheless writes in his Portuguese journal: "Nina did not leave me of her own will, since God took her in order to cause me to think in a creative manner, namely in order to facilitate my redemption. Nina's departure will have a soteriological meaning for the rest of my life. My separation from Maitreyi nineteen years earlier also had meaning: I escaped India, I abandoned Yoga and Hindu philosophy for Romanian culture and for my writing."[69]

God, "Dumnezeu," the Christian Romanian term, now plays the role previously played by maya: in both cases, however, separation from a woman is conceived of as ultimately providential, and painful as the experience may be at a certain moment, it had an ultimate positive value: to guide Eliade on his mission.[70] The Hindu terminology disappears, and he resorts to monotheistic terminology, which is part of a greater shift toward a more Christian religiosity characteristic of his period in Portugal, when he turned to perusing the Bible and Leon Shestov's writings. Some years later in *No Souvenirs*, he considers his separation from Romanian culture part of his journey toward a universal approach.[71] It seems that in Eliade's view, his destiny is a series of escapes from limited universes that confine his aspirations, universes that are represented by the various women, into the final journey toward a more universal perspective and destiny.[72] Despite this plausible reading of the preceding sources, I hardly believe that this was always the manner in which he initiated his behavior, but rather a late reflection on the possible meaning of events in his life.[73] Nevertheless,

69. Eliade, *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 270–71 (my translation). See also Alexandrescu, *Mircea Eliade: Dinspre Portugalia*, 215–16.

70. This mission is described here as related to Romanian culture, though in the same journal there is also another one, the discovery of the pre-Socratics—namely, the primitive men—and bringing them back to life. See *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 284.

71. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 189.

72. See Eliade's remark about Rica, another girlfriend he had in 1928: "I knew that I would leave her behind, and that I shall go ahead, alone." *Santier*, in Mircea Eliade, *Proza* (Bucarest: Humanitas, 2003), 362 (my translation). Compare the descriptions of the protagonist's relationship with his girlfriends in his early novel *Gaudeamus*. This lady was identified as Rica Botez, who recalled her relations to Eliade in an interview with Mircea Handoca, *Convorbiri cu si despre Eliade*, 82–93.

73. See also Alexandrescu, *Mircea Eliade, Dinspre Portugalia*, 215–16, who mentions Eliade's modelation of his life.

the emergence of such a narrative is important in itself, even more so when it informs some of his literary creations, the most representative in this context being *The Houligans* and to a certain extent *The Forbidden Forest*.

To return to the passage from "The Bridge" cited at the beginning of this section: in this story the lieutenant, the privileged spiritual individual, encounters several women—girls, widows, and married young ladies—every evening as part of a mysterious ritual, in order to try to find out who, if anyone, embodies the goddess that evening. So, for example, we read: "This is the lieutenant's problem: how to identify the great Goddess among those five or ten young and beautiful women who are around him every evening?"[74] The answer to the problem, which is not clear to me, is based upon the assumed existence of a concrete affinity between the naked body of the great Goddess and the stalk and cluster of grapes that emanate from that body. This affinity, according to the writer, explains how "the lieutenant identifies every evening the great Goddess that is camouflaged in one of those ladies, widows, or mademoiselles."[75] This mystery is also mentioned elsewhere,[76] and again a woman is the embodiment, in a camouflaged manner, of a higher principle, and a man is the privileged person who understands this coded though concrete message. The mystery about the naked body of Melania, exposed in an unspecified ritual, lies at the core of Eliade's *Light That Fails*—though I did not detect a resort to the term "camouflage" in this early novel. In any case, Eliade confessed that he understood the hidden meaning of this novel only later on, in 1963: "The "mystery" of *La Lumiere* . . . was really only the mystery of my existence in Dasgupta's house."[77] Again we witness Eliade's vision of his life as a mystery, and an important piece of evidence that the author himself considered his *literaria* a helpful source for his self-understanding of his *personalia*. Moreover, this novel was written while Eliade was immersing himself in the practices of Yoga,[78] and, as Eliade recognized, some of the experiences he reached then were the basis of his book on Yoga.[79] This novel, together with his other later novel, *The Secret of Dr. Honigberger*, may also have made a contribution to his *Yoga*. In short, some of the personal experiences of his Yoga exercises found expression in the academic book on Yoga, and others in a literary work.

74. Eliade, *Podul*, in *In Curte la Dionis*, 202 (my translation).

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 199.

77. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 184. Compare also his *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 153.

78. See Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 191.

79. Ibid., 189–90. See also Mircea Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude Henri-Rocquet*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 47.

## Eliade's Attitude to the Science of Religion and the Problem of Decoding

The doubts that a scholar may have had may prove as helpful for understanding him as his positive arguments. After all, the emergence of serious scholarship is a long and often tortuous process, whose rejected alternatives may reveal as much as the conclusion. Most scholarship does not explicitly discuss this process of indecision and then selection. But a perusal of Eliade's *personalia* may contribute much to a better understanding of his attitude to his field of investigation. The confessions that we find there reveal that Eliade was aware of two weaknesses in his academic oeuvre: that it deals with a field that cannot be properly understood in too erudite a manner, and that he himself did not indeed prove his main theoretical claim about the camouflaged sacred.

The source of Eliade's camouflage theory in Hindu views of maya has cognitive repercussions. Operating after the Kantian revolution—though not so much after the Copernican one—Eliade is well aware that a scholar can hardly exhaust the meaning of such a subtle, cryptic, and fluid event as a hierophany in the way he understood it. That the science of religion is haunted by this cognitive problem we learn from some interesting expressions we may detect in his more personal writings and, to a much lesser extent, in his academic ones. Eliade was sometimes aware of the problematic that his emphasis on the rare and evasive moments of hierophany in the understanding of religion creates for an academic discipline.

> This vice[80] which I satisfy beside a library full of erudite treatises, beside a table loaded with dictionaries and texts—elevates me in my own eyes. It gives me a weird sense of freedom. I say to myself that not everything is lost.[81] . . . With this "secular" reading I satisfy all the loathing I have for erudition,[82] and for the honest and useless work, for these cherished sciences—which, just because they are dear to me, I burn with a desire to despise, to "betray" them, to humiliate them.[83]

The attraction to academic work, on the one hand, and the feeling that it is "useless work," on the other hand, is a situation that returns, mutatis mutandis,

80. Of reading belles lettres.

81. See also Eliade, *Santierul, Proza*, 301.

82. The same contempt toward erudition is found also in Eliade, *Jurnalul Portughez*, vol. 1, 293. See also his autobiographical fragment of 1953, printed *in Imagination and Meaning*, 114–16.

83. Eliade, *Santierul, Proza*, 364 (1931). Compare the way in which he describes on the same page of this book the manner in which he treats one of his girlfriends, Ruth. See ibid., 364–65, 394.

like a leitmotif throughout his life. In two later instances he expresses his vision of the discipline as "ungraspable." When writing to Raffaelle Pettazzoni, the first scholar of religion whose theories Eliade studied seriously in his youth, Eliade confesses: "You were my first master in this thrilling but ungraspable 'science' of religions."[84] There is something of an oxymoron here: a science that is in fact "ungraspable." More than twenty years later, in a letter addressed to another scholar of religion and a close friend, the Swedish Orientalist Stig Wikander, he wrote: "In fact, I am more and more attracted to literature—and there are days in which I regret that I have abandoned it for some fascinating, though ungraspable[85] disciplines."[86] "Disciplines" take here the place of "science," but this does not diminish the oxymoronic nature of the statement. The two characterizations of the study of religion are interesting: "dear", "thrilling," and "fascinating," on the one hand, and "ungraspable" as a possible parallel to "useless," on the other hand. Both betray Eliade's profound attraction to the study of religion but at the same time also his understanding that there is something unreachable in the entire endeavor. In one instance at least, Eliade expresses the feeling that a literary or poetic language is a better tool than a scientific one for expressing his spiritual experiences.[87]

Another passage occurs in a letter to Wikander written in January 1953, responding to a letter of the latter commenting, in a rather reserved manner, on some claims about symbolism made by Eliade's *Images and Symbols*: "I am again assaulted by doubts. I believe that we should study Time more, in order to achieve something more solid than our unhappy studies."[88] Indeed, if religion so strongly gravitates around "dialectics and mystery of camouflage," as one of the preceding citations suggests, it can rarely be deciphered with a great certainty. That is why a critic of Eliade's method, Hans H. Penner, penetratingly wrote of his approach that "a science of religion based upon a mystery remains a mysterious science."[89]

Eliade emphasized the cryptic nature of the sacred as part of the logic of camouflage: "When something sacred manifests itself (hierophany), at the same time something 'occults' itself, becomes cryptic. Therein is the true dialectic of the sacred: by the mere fact of *showing* itself, the sacred *hides itself*.

84. Mircea Eliade and Raffaelle Pettazzoni, *L'histoire des religions a-t-elle un sens? Correspondance 1926–1959*, ed. Natale Spineto (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 166 (November 1947).

85. The French original is again "insaisissables." See Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America, Corespondenta, R–Z*, vol. 3, ed. Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004), 374.

86. Mircea Eliade, *Intodeauna Orientul: Corespondenta Mircea Eliade—Stig Wikander (1948–1977)*, ed. and trans. Mihaela Timus (Iasi: Polirom, 2005), 216 (January 1969).

87. Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, 190.

88. Eliade, *Intodeauna Orientul*, 152.

89. Hans H. Penner, "Creating a Brahman: A Structural Approach to Religion," in *Methodological Issues in Religious Studies*, ed. Robert B. Baird (Chico, Calif.: New Horizons Press, 1975), 55; Dubuisson, *Mitologii*, 193.

We can never claim that we definitively understand a religious phenomenon: something—perhaps even essential—will be understood by us later, or by others, immediately."[90]

However, what this surface is and how someone may be certain that a real sign is intended for him are important questions that Eliade never answered in any detail. One answer is simply a recommendation to invent:

> Every[91] exile is a Ulysses traveling toward Ithaca. Every real existence reproduces the Odyssey. The path toward Ithaca, toward the center. I had known all that for a long time. What I have just discovered is that the chance to become a new Ulysses is given to *any* exile *whatsoever*. . . . But to realize this the exile must be capable of penetrating the hidden meaning of his wanderings, and of understanding them as a long series of initiation trials. . . . That means: seeing signs,[92] hidden meanings, symbols, in the sufferings, the depressions, the dry periods in everyday life. Seeing them and reading them even *if they aren't there*; if one sees them, one can build a structure and read a message in the formless flow of things and the monotonous flux of historical events.[93]

This is not the place to analyze this seminal passage in detail; it reflects a strong totalizing tendency, characteristic of Eliade's style. Here we are far away from the early ontological understanding of the camouflage. In fact, that term is here absent, and the center of gravitation shifts from the deciphering of messages inherent in an objective manifestation of the divine to the projection of a narrative that creates significance for the meaningless sequence of events in a private or historical series. In this case it is much less the need for recognition that allows one to discern a message from beyond than the ingenuity of an exegete whose creative imagination is capable of inserting meanings even if they do not constitute an adequate understanding of a personal life or a history. It is quite obvious that the three different planes of discourse, the personal, the literary, and the religious, do not differ significantly: all events or texts are raw material for an insightful interpretation. We witness here a shift from what

90. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 268.

91. The frequent resort to the word "every" is characteristic of Eliade and creates too homogeneous a vision of the religious life. See, e.g., Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 63–64. For a parallel to "every" in the word "always," see his *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, 126.

92. See also Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 170. On Eliade's demand of seeing signs, see more in the coda.

93. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 84–85 (January 1, 1960), emphases in the original. See also Calinescu, "Introduction," xiv–xv. Paraphrasing this quote, Ioan P. Culianu said in his *Pacatul Impotriva Spiritului*, 133, that every exile should identify with Elie Wiesel. I would just say that every exile should find his or her own way. Cf. Eliade, *Journal*, vol. 3, 277.

David Tracy called the "hermeneutic of retrieval"[94] to what I would describe as a creative process of arcanization that infuses new meanings in texts or events that may not intend them at all.[95] I assume that also in this later case, the inventive creativity, or creative imagination, may be nourished by the awareness of religious narratives already known.

In fact, we may discern a shift between the more experiential period in Eliade's youth, especially the period in India, when the manifestation was more "impressive," and a later period, in which the human imposing of meaning is less a matter of deciphering than of building a narrative that is to be imposed upon the formless flux. This later phase can be described as more "expressive" of the human spirit, or more humanistic. The earlier period conceived more of a Platonic recognition, a disclosure of the hidden, closer to a manifestation of the objective, while the later phase came closer to a sort of proclamation related to the specific ingenuity of the individual. In Ioan P. Culianu's terms, the "first" Eliade deals with the irruption of the miraculous in the world, whereas the "second" Eliade assumes that meaning is established by hermeneutics itself, as part of the much stronger emphasis Eliade placed in this period on the power of imagination.[96] In both cases, however, *homo religiosus* can learn from the history of religion about patterns that may help him to see through the camouflage. Though I accept this distinction in principle, his short story "Under the Shadow of the Lily," written late in his life, in 1982, reflects the approach of the early Eliade.

The vagueness of Eliade's hermeneutics has much to do with the vagueness of his vision of the sacred, an issue that will be dealt with later. The vagueness in both fields is hardly helpful for scholars, though much more inspiring and creative for religious persons in search of an encounter with the sacred. However, in both instances, it is harder to speak about an articulated Eliadean hermeneutic, comparable to that of Paul Ricoeur or Georg Gadamer, than about a hermeneutic orientation, which draws from the past ideals with which *homo religiosus* should identify. Thus, we may ask to what extent the categorizations found in his *Patterns* help the existential search to identify or to decipher something meaningful in reality, or to interpret it creatively, and to what extent they help the scholar concerned more with comprehensive religious systems that

94. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 100; Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 156, 205.

95. See, e.g., Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfection: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 9–10, 253–54, 280–83.

96. Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, 256; Culianu, "Mircea Eliade et la Tortue Borgne," in *Homo Religiosus*, 83–84; see also Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 20–21.

are fragmented into unrelated themes when their elements are dealt with in an isolated manner.[97]

## Eliade's "Camouflage of the Sacred" and Other Types of Scholarly Esotericism

Understanding has much to do with comparison: it implies perceiving both similarities and differences. Eliade, like Jung, was more concerned with the former. From time to time, however, close analysis of details reveals that dissimilarities may teach as much as the perceived resemblances. Two Jewish scholars, Leo Strauss and Gershom Scholem, were somewhat senior to Eliade, but their roads crossed often, and they were all deeply interested in esotericism. A comparison between the ways in which esotericism functioned in their studies may illumine Eliade's own resort to "camouflage."

Strauss developed a theory about the history of philosophy, according to which esotericism is a special manner of writing intended to preserve secrets from the multitude and to defend the philosophical elite from being misunderstood by both the multitude and the rulers. Starting with Plato, a series of Western thinkers, Muslims, Jews, and Christians, adopted this approach, to which Strauss devoted a long series of monographs. This type of philosophical esotericism is political in essence, but it entails a vision of religion as a special type of knowledge, in fact a fiction invented by philosophers in order to regulate the behavior of the multitude. From this point of view, Strauss claimed that many philosophers masked their views, and Strauss himself did so too, at least in some cases. In a similar manner, though more openly, Gershom Scholem recognized that he himself resorted to some form of camouflage. In an interview he gave in 1974, in a passage that scholars have ignored, he said quite explicitly: "Beyond all the camouflages, the masks, and the philological games in which I excel, something hidden is also inspiring me. I can understand that something of this kind is kindled in the hearts of my listeners—among the secular ones—just as it was kindled in me."[98]

The something "hidden" is an aspect of Kabbalah, which is able to inspire people in different periods, and Scholem confesses that he is also inspired. (The Hebrew term that I translated as "camouflages" is *haswwa'ot*.) Scholem

97. See also Allen, *Myth and Religion*, 268–69. Eliade was indubitably aware of this problem, but he chose another methodological approach. See, e.g., Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 163; Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, 118.

98. Gershom Scholem, *Devarim be-Go: Explications and Implications*, ed. Abraham Shapira (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976), 52 (Hebrew). Thanks to Leon Volovici, who kindly drew my attention to this passage.

describes the academic games he accepts as camouflage, and there is something external that is implied here, namely, a certain Kabbalistic matter that would inspire him just as other Kabbalistic aspects inspired other persons over the centuries. In any case, the camouflage is not a form taken over by the sacred but a cover Scholem adopts as part of his scientific enterprise. As Steven M. Wasserstrom has pointed out, Joseph Weiss, a close student of Scholem's, described him in 1948 in quite similar terms, using the Hebrew term "camouflage" to claim that Scholem disguised the fact that he was a metaphysical thinker.[99] Unlike Eliade's "banal" persons who are the camouflage of the sacred and the mysterious, Scholem and Strauss are exceptional individuals who choose masks in order to operate in their academic environment. Their esotericism or camouflage is related not to ontological manifestations but to certain dimensions of texts, or their understanding of texts. Unlike Scholem and Strauss (and, to a great extent, Henri Corbin), Eliade's esotericism and camouflage are much less concerned with texts. The single instance in Eliade where the camouflage has to do with hiding ideas is found in his *Noaptea de Sinziene*, mainly in the context of disguising one's ideas under the Communist regime.[100]

However, different as the three scholars are, and divergent as their understandings of esotericism are, they share some interesting features. All three are part of what I would call the "generation of discontent," namely, interwar scholars for whom religion was not only a scholarly enterprise but also part of their protest against the intellectual and religious establishment. They attempted to "recover" or retrieve an allegedly forgotten or repressed type of spirituality by finding new clues to traditions that their cultural entourage had understood differently. But their efforts were much more extensive than bringing some forgotten texts to light; they forged much more comprehensive schemes, dealing with phenomena that took place over millennia, and in different continents. This is the way in which Scholem sees the history of Jewish mysticism as a repressed dimension of Judaism, and Strauss depicts an esoteric dimension of philosophy from Plato, through Al-Farabi and Maimonides, to Spinoza. The three are "protestant" thinkers, attempting to reform the dominant understanding of the humanities, and seekers of keys, or, rather, seekers of universal keys.[101] Only their claim to have comprehensive keys made them able to reform their respective fields in such a dramatic manner.

99. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 59.

100. Mircea Eliade, *Noaptea de Sinziene* (Bucharest: Univers enciclopedic, 1999), 141, 476–77.

101. For Scholem's search for keys, see Moshe Idel, "Hieroglyphs, Keys, Enigmas. On G.G. Scholem's Vision of Kabbalah: Between Franz Molitor and Franz Kafka," in *Arche Noah, Die Idee der <Kultur> im deutsch-juedischen Diskurs*, ed. Bernhard Greiner and Christoph Schmidt (Freiburg: Rombach, 2002), 241–42.

## Some Conclusions

One of the passages quoted earlier includes the phrase "the mystery of the dialectic of the camouflaging of the sacred in the profane." Elements of this phrase also recur, in different combinations, in other passages, such as a letter to Barbu Brezianu to be cited later. The explanatory power of clusters of terms in which mystery accompanies camouflage, dialectic is coupled with mystery, the sacred is described within the profane, the "dialectics of hierophany" is emphasized,[102] or camouflage is used in a paradoxical manner,[103] is not self-evident, nor is it a perfect recipe for clarity. Often, Eliade refers also to ambivalence, ambiguity, and paradox, in the context of his treatments of the sacred.[104] One can hardly imagine more vague terms, or understand how such clusters could help to convey a theory that would inspire poor scholars like me, who deal with religious texts through a detailed and articulated analysis of primary materials. It may well be that other types of material, such as folklore, lend themselves better to an understanding based on such a diffuse terminology. It may well be that Eliade's effort to integrate oral and material forms of religious expression into a scholarly culture based so dramatically on analyses of texts called for more vague definitions of both the topics and the hermeneutical tools.

Eliade discussed the theory of camouflage of the sacred without always indicating the precise quality he was discussing. No one is entitled to argue with a personal conviction about the way in which someone understands his life, or even makes important decisions based on any theories. In principle, to adopt a certain theory of the divine or reality, or a certain anthropology, in order to write novels, is a practice that no one would object to in a novelist, especially when some of those novels and short stories are understood to be fantastic. However, for an expert on Eliade's literary opus like Eugen Simion, Eliade's theoretical assumptions as narrator were too vague:

> The art of the writer of fantastic prose would be based, therefore, upon the disclosure of the transcendental background that hides itself within the depths of existence. What the precise nature of that background is, and how it is perceived from an Epic point of view, the prose-writer does not make precise. His theory remains at the

102. See Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 178.

103. See Eliade's introduction to his *Two Strange Tales* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986).

104. See Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 130–33; Allen, *Mircea Eliade*, 96–97, 110–13; Dubuisson, *Mitologii*, 305. For maya and Varuna as ambiguous and ambivalent, see Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 202–3.

> abstract level of notions. It is difficult, again, to draw from those general propositions, doubtless valuable, a personal way of conceiving and organizing the fantastic narrative.[105]

However, Eliade's general claims, as a scholar of religion, about the nature of religion or the sacred in itself, or in its camouflaged forms, must be fostered by as many primary material expressions or texts as possible and by their detailed analysis, in order to win the acceptance of such a general and comprehensive understanding of religion or of the sacred. *Surprisingly enough, Eliade did not do this in a systematic manner anywhere in his academic writings, as far as I know.*[106] The two short references to camouflage in the first volume of *A History of Religious Ideas* do not analyze even a single text but refer to Greek religion in general terms,[107] or to the camouflage of the sacred in the radical desacralization of physical love, "such as is found in so many other creations of the Greek genius."[108] In both cases, he hints at what he will write in volume 3, a chapter that was never written.

Eliade probably was aware of this major lacuna in his treatment, as we learn from another important passage written as late as 1976: "I'd have to develop considerably what I understand by 'dialectic of the camouflaging of the sacred,' and that would take sixty pages."[109] However, this promise to himself and to others[110] never materialized during the last decade of his life. Nevertheless, scholars dealing with his theory of the camouflaged sacred had to speculate about or attempt to reconstruct Eliade's precise intention in such a crucial concept.[111] However, fascinating as those reconstructions are for the history of

105. Simion, *Mircea Eliade, Nodurile si semnele prozei*, 217.

106. His article "Survivances et camouflages des mythes," in Mircea Eliade, *Aspects du Mythe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 197–231, deals with the camouflage of myths but only briefly with the camouflage of the sacred, while elsewhere he deals with the camouflage in modern artists. The sole brief discussion of camouflage, on pp. 174–75, does not refer to any specific source. See Allen, *Myth and Religion*, 269–90. My concern here is, however, with the pertinence of the theory of the camouflage of the sacred in the banal in religion, not in modern life, which is another topic.

107. Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, 263: "Sacrality is in a sense camouflaged in the immediate, in the natural, in the everyday. . . . The sacralization of human finitude and of the banality of the ordinary existence is a comparatively frequent phenomenon in the history of religion." This statement is reminiscent of what he wrote in his *personalia* and *literaria* adduced above. Here we have a tangible example for a transition from earlier views expressed in nonacademic contexts into views expressed in an academic text. See also the next note.

108. Ibid., 283. No one single reference to those cases was given. It should also be mentioned that in Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen: A Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 155–75, in the section entitled "Man and the Sacred," no one single text or remark dealing with the theory of camouflage can be found. This does not mean that scholars of Eliade's opus more diligent than I will not discover somewhere in Eliade's *academica* some more references to the camouflage of the sacred, and I look forward very much to reading them.

109. Eliade, *Journal*, vol. 3, 228. See also earlier the quote from pp. 220–21. He returned, however, to the topic of camouflage once again in 1982, in his "Under the Shadow of a Lily." See above note 42.

110. See Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, xviI.

111. See Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 215–30; Danca, *Mircea Eliade: Definitio Sacri*, 219.

the scholarship of religion, or in themselves as ingenuous intellectual exercises, in my opinion the fundamental problem for the more mundane history of religion should be formulated as follows: What, in addition to the Hindu theory of maya, are the underlying primary sources that justify the very formulation of the theory of camouflage as part of a general theory of the sacred? Are there substantial additional understandings of the sacred as camouflage, independent of the Hindu ones, that would justify the extension of a basically Hindu theory, with some Christian additions in some cases,[112] to a general theory of the sacred? Personal convictions or insights reached by the imaginative or oneiric processes related to fantastic literary writings, or "philosophical meditations," may serve as starting points that may inspire a process of collecting primary material in various religions but cannot dispense a critical presentation of such a material. *The fact that the most articulated and elaborated discussions on this topic recur in personal notes and in literary writings rather than in academic ones is quite problematic from a critical point of view.* Indeed, Eliade describes in some detail how his academic writings emerged from intuitions found first in his literary ones.[113] It seems that even Eliade was somehow aware of this situation when, in 1978, he answered Claude-Henri Rocquet's question about the sacred in modern times: "But all that is still a problem, and I very much hope that someone will go into it properly, really set about deciphering *the camouflage adopted by the sacred in a desacralized world*."[114] One of his last important remarks on camouflage, in a letter dated 1979 and addressed to his friend Barbu Brezianu, a historian of art, restates his call for what I call arcanization:

> Condemned as we are to decipher the "mysteries" and "to discover the way to redemption" via culture, namely through *books* (not via oral traditions transmitted from a master to a disciple), we have nothing better to do than to deepen the dialectics of the mysterious *coincidentia oppositorum*, which allows us to discover "the sacred" camouflaged in the "profane" but also to *resacralize in a creative manner* the historical moment, in other words to transfigure it, by attributing to it [*acordindu-i*] a transcendental dimension (or "an intention").[115]

112. The combination between the Hindu and the Christian elements in Eliade's theory of camouflage has been pointed out by Lazu, "Dialectica Sacrului," 110–16.

113. See the autobiographical fragment of 1953, translated in *Imagination and Meaning*, 123–24.

114. Eliade, *The Quest*, 139, emphasis in the original. See also Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 151, 155.

115. Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America, Corespondenta, Corespondenta A–H*, 112 (my translation), emphases in the original.

Some years later, he suggested that the sacred is camouflaged in "crime" in the case of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac,[116] and he gave an optimistic description of the wonderful camouflaged worlds, in an interview for a movie.[117] The scant discussions of primary sources that could foster an academic theory of camouflage may be compared to the much more documented manner in which Eliade made his other central points in the phenomenology of religion, such as shamanism, his analysis of Yoga, or the importance of the center and of the *axis mundi*. In these cases he quoted or referred to a huge variety of religious sources, often analyzing them in considerable detail, and they may serve as starting points of fruitful scholarly discussions or, when necessary, critiques.[118]

But if we ignore the absence of a sustained and systematic effort to offer an analysis of primary sources for the theory of the camouflage of the sacred in the banal, we can nevertheless address the place of Eliade's theory in the history of scholarship of religion. What happened in this field with the emergence of Eliade's scholarship is no less than a paradigm shift from a field dominated by a monotheistic propensity to one that takes much more into consideration Hindu thought and primitive religion, filtered as they were by three major Hindu concepts: brahman, atman, and maya. Important as Eliade's opening to other forms of religion was in the general economy of religion, it has nevertheless a propensity to work with a certain axiology, or theory of value. Assuming that the role of the scholar of religion is to facilitate the possibility of an encounter between the hegemonic European-monotheistic understanding of religion and the Eastern one—no doubt a laudable purpose—this new mission nevertheless reflects Eliade's biography, especially the Hindu concept of maya, as much as the Judeo-Christian background that colored much of the study of religion in the generation prior to Eliade. While the monotheistic understandings of religion represented an allegedly advanced stage, within the assumption of a progressive-Hegelian structure, Eliade worked with the very opposite vector. The good times are not to be expected in the future but were already in the past, and true religion is to be sought in primordial times, *in illo tempore*. Instead of the monotheistic vision, based on a stark distinction between, on the one hand, a proper worship and true exclusive belief and, on the other, false

116. Mircea Eliade, *Journal IV, 1979–1985*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 111–12; cf. Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, 176. Recently several articles about Eliade's theory of sacrifice have been printed, and they deserve a special analysis: see the studies of Aurel Codoban, Gianluca Nesi, and Cristiano Grotanelli, and some discussions in Dubuisson, *Mitologii*, 204, 229–30. Most of those scholars emphasize, correctly in my opinion, the affinities between Eliade's treatment of sacrifice and a certain aspect of the ideology of the Iron Guard. See note 128.

117. See Paul Barbaneagra, *Arhitectura si geografia sacra: Mircea Eliade si descoperirea sacrului* (Iasi: Polirom, 2000), 199. Here Guenon's theory accompanies Eliade's.

118. See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 88–103, 128.

ones, and on a revelation in privileged places, times, and individuals, Eliade adopted a much more Hindu view in order to emphasize the ambiguity, the coincidence of opposites, or the veiled existence of God within the banality of the quotidian life. One sort of privileged theological *imaginaire*—the Western monotheistic one as represented by Rudolph Otto's Christian stand, for example[119]—has been replaced by another, a combination of Eastern theology, rotating around maya as camouflage, and a Christian vision of Incarnation, presented as a comprehensive vision of religion in Eliade's theory of the sacred. The sociological vision of the sacred and of religion in general, from Émile Durkheim and his school (which is, in my opinion, a form of a Jewish societal approach), preceded both of the others. For all these three major theoreticians of the sacred of the twentieth century, a biographical starting point gradually becomes a general theory of the nature of the sacred and is at least implicitly extended to more universal proportions. But the two other great theoreticians, too, were acquainted with Hinduism. This is certainly true of Rudolph Otto, but also of Durkheim, at least according to the view of Ivan Strenski, who pointed out the impact of the illustrious indologist Sylvain Levi on Durkheim.[120] However, neither of the other two scholars invested so much energy in an experiential encounter with Hindu mystical techniques, and the Hindu impact on their vision of the sacred is much more veiled than it is in Eliade.

From another point of view, the theory of the existence of a camouflage of the sacred within the profane and the banal represents a great scholarly effort to re-enchant reality in a world that opted dramatically for disenchantment. The re-enchantment is effected on the basis of older religious examples, which involve a strongly pre-Copernican worldview and hardly take into consideration the new worldviews that larger audiences have increasingly adopted in the last two generations. There is nothing wrong in attempting to understand the worldview of pre-Copernican societies, but their worldview is hardly what is needed to reform the religious life of modern persons who live, knowingly or not, in an Einsteinian, or at least a Newtonian, universe. Neither is the centrality of the paradigm of creation myths, so important in Eliade,[121] easily digestible in a period when modern cosmogonic theories differ so much from traditional creation myths.

119. See Moshe Idel, "*Ganz Andere*: On Rudolph Otto and Concepts of Holiness in Jewish Mysticism," *Daat* 57–59 (2006): 5–44.

120. See Ivan Strenski, *Durkheim and the Jews of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

121. See especially, Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 410–19; Mircea Eliade, *Commentaries on the Legend of Mesterul Manole*, reprinted in *Drumul spre centru*, 447–52; Mircea Eliade, *Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 183–87. See also Martin Buber, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, trans. Maurice Freedman (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1988), 121; and the many myths analyzed by Bruce Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos and Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), and Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 99.

Who, after all, was Eliade? No doubt he was an extraordinarily rich and complex intellectual personality: a spiritual traveler, a prose writer with strong religious concerns, and an eminent scholar of world religions. I opt for seeing his personal religious quest as an important element that informed much of his two other domains of activity. However, it is possible to view him in an even more integrated manner. In two short characterizations of Eliade, Ioan P. Culianu proposed a quite daring description of Eliade's literary writings. In one of them, intended to be a question to be put to Eliade himself, an event that never happened, he wrote:

> My interpretation of your literary opus is that of Eliade as a great mystagogue, who creates myths while aware that they are based on nothing but is convinced of their existential and pedagogical value. The goal that is sought is, in a certain sense, soteriological. He wants to help man to retrieve the lost significance of his existence, of his fate on this earth. . . . Is this description convenient to you?[122]

Culianu explicitly restricted his formulation to Eliade's *literaria*. Similarly, another literary critique, Eugen Simion, proposes an interesting term to describe Eliade's understanding of the role of his literary writings: "Literature should assume the engagement of the camouflaged sacred in history."[123] It may, however, be said that the mystagogic function of the literary opus is also compatible with many of his academic writings, which turned more and more prescriptive with time.[124] However, in both cases, the mystagogic role was, in my opinion, the result of Eliade's strong conviction that he was destined to play a unique role in the world, as adumbrated in some of the quotes adduced earlier in this chapter.

Let me attempt to summarize my argument from the point of view of understanding the thought of Eliade. I see in the two most central factors of his life, the Romanian and the Hindu experiences and acquaintance with their cultures, the determinant factors in his thought and literature, as well as in his self-awareness. A third major source of inspiration is the Italian Renaissance, a topic to which he dedicated his Master's thesis in 1928, and in his writings he returns many times to the paradigmatic nature of the intercultural encounters of Florentine Renaissance and its reverberations in the European occult, among

122. Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, 270. See also ibid., 256. Culianu refers to Eliade as mystagogue several times in his characterization of Eliade the writer. See ibid., 247, 250; his "Mircea Eliade et la Tortue Borgne," in *Homo Religiosus*, 83–84; and Glodeanu, *Coordinate ale imaginarului*, 58–59.

123. Simion, *Mircea Eliade, Nodurile si semnele prozei*, 219. On the issue of "humanitarian engagement," see Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, 97.

124. See also Dubuisson, *Mitologii*, 192, 280, 304. Some mystagogic or "prophetic" components are to be found also in Jung, Corbin, Scholem, and Strauss, and even more in their followers. But even these four thinkers rarely went so far in their prescriptive tone as Eliade did.

people like René Guenon and Julius Evola.[125] Eliade called for "a second Renaissance," which was to be much more comprehensive than the Italian one.[126] This call for a new, expanded humanism, which is inclusive of many cultures unknown to Italian Renaissance thinkers, is definitely reminiscent of the new Italian concept of humanism.[127] This emphasis on these three topics as formative for Eliade's worldviews means that two other intellectual factors in Eliade's life, his more formal adherence to the Iron Guard in 1937[128] and his prolonged participation in the Eranos encounters at Ascona since 1950,[129] should be seen as less formative from the intellectual point of view, as their impact on Eliade's writings can only rarely be established through strict historical and philological tools. The first period, his sympathy and perhaps some form of participation in the activity of the Iron Guard, was relatively short, while the second, the Eranos meetings, occurred relatively late in his career. In both cases, it is difficult to pinpoint precise sources and ideas that impacted upon Eliade's thought. In the case of the three other sources, by comparison, the impact is quite obvious and profound. This does not mean that the Iron Guard and Eranos should be ignored or neglected in scholarship but only that a careful inspection of the possible impact of more concrete literary sources should determine the relevance or the depth of the impact of those events.[130]

125. See Mircea Eliade, *Contributions a la philosophie de la Renaissance*, trans. Alain Paruit (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 9–59; Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 3, trans. Alf Hitlebeitel and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 251–55; Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 227; Eliade, *The Quest*, 37–39; Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth*, 20; Eliade, *Journal*, vol. 3, 280; Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, 138–40; and Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 39–42, 112–15. See also Dudley, *Religion on Trial*, 43–44; Danca, *Mircea Eliade, Definitio Sacri*, 47–54; Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 44; Dubuisson, *Mitologii*, 275, 279, 294, 297–99, 310n25; and Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 42–47. A strong proclivity to occultism is evident in quite an early piece written at the end of his high school "Stiinta si Ocultism," reprinted in *Cum am gasit piatra filosofala, Scrieri de tinerete, 1921–1925*, ed. Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 246–47. I hope to discuss elsewhere the impact of the Ficinian theory of true religion as a *prisca theologia* on Eliade's unified vision of religion.

126. See Eliade, *The Quest*, 55–57. There were, nevertheless, earlier European calls, like Schopenhauer's, for the integration of India in Europe.

127. See ibid., 1–11; Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 108; and Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 443–46.

128. This point was made repeatedly by Dubuisson in *Mitologii*. On the Legionnaire period of Eliade in general, see, e.g., Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, trans. Charles Kormos (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991), 87–92, 132–50; and Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 227–301. Though one should neither ignore the possible impact of this very sad episode on Eliade's life and thought (see, e.g., note 116 above), nor neglect his silence over his tainted past, unproved exaggerations by some of Eliade's critics as to his Fascism and its profound impact on his scholarship do not contribute to our understanding of him. Here, and elsewhere (see note 130), I opt for a more careful historical and philological examination of the development of his thought. On the other hand, too general statements in the defense of Eliade, again without resorting to primary texts, are scarcely helpful.

129. See Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*.

130. See my *Ascensions on High*, 216–28. I do not recommend extrapolating from my analyses of the vicissitudes of the academic inquiry into the camouflaged sacred to any other topic in Eliade's works.

To be sure: Eliade's actual biography did not serve as a major blueprint for his literary works or for the theories about the camouflaged sacred that he introduced in his academic writings. *However, the way in which Eliade imagined the meaning of his life did so.*[131] This type of *imaginaire* regarding one's life has no doubt much to do with real events, but also with theories learned or inherited before or after some real events happened. Though a person may live his life without resorting to too many profound theories and mysteries about it, he remembers it more in the way in which he imagined it postfactum. If there is a pattern for this remembering of the events of one's life as a meaningful and mysterious narrative, it is hardly surprising that an entire fantastic literature might be written under the impact of such a blueprint. However, what concerns me more is the extent to which this blueprint might affect a person's academic activity.[132] After all, the significance of academic discourse is that it can be shared with others in as transparent a manner as possible and verified by other scholars who do not share the same life experience. Eliade's powerful early experiences of yoga and Tantra exercises were a major source of his confidence in his special destiny, namely, of building a special narrative about his life, based on the "providence" exercised in a camouflaged manner by maya, or on what he called his "personal mythology" related to mystery.[133] For him, his literary works sometimes constitute a form of hierophany that operates within an oneiric state of mind, and this is why he is surprised when he discovers their content, especially when it deals with the camouflage of the sacred. Some intuitions that found their first expression in Eliade's *literaria* then contributed to his *academica*.

Did Eliade also believe—one may ask—that he himself was in a way a divine manifestation camouflaged as an "apparently banal" human being? Or, alternatively, did he imagine that he reached a special or extraordinary human status by means of his yoga exercises?[134] These are fascinating questions; to try to answer them—if such an answer is possible at all—another, by now hypothetical, study is necessary. I would say that if indeed Eliade nourished such unusual self-perceptions in his youth, they diminished in his mature years.

131. See, especially, what he wrote in Eliade, *Journal*, vol. 3, 277.

132. Cf. Sorin Alexandrescu's distinction between the literary as imaginative and the academic as retrieving and critical. in "Mircea Eliade, la narrazione contra il significato," in Mincu and Scagno, *Mircea Eliade e l'Italia*, 311.

133. See Eliade, *Journal*, vol. 3, 277.

134. On the possibility of transcending of the human condition by resorting to yoga techniques, see Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), 85–90, 313–18, 339–41, and remarks scattered throughout his memoirs. In his novel *Bengali Nights*, Eliade reports that Maitreyi regarded him as a god. On the centrality of the concept of *theosis* in Orthodox Christianity, see Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 3, 217.

## Coda: Eliade's Theory of Camouflage in Banality and Mihail Sebastian's *The Star without Name*

Let me turn to what may be the earliest possible reverberation of Eliade's theory of the camouflage of the sacred outside his own writings. The warm friendship between him and Mihail Sebastian (1907–45) (a literary pseudonym for Iosif Hechter), which lasted for a decade or so between 1927 and early 1938, is a well-known episode in Romanian interwar culture.[135] The two authors were discovered and encouraged by the same intellectual protector, Nae Ionescu; both of them worked at the same newspaper, *Cuvintul*, for several years; both were very successful authors of novels, plays, and short stories; and both were active members of the same cultural association, Criterion. In fact, they had more than parallel lives in common: Sebastian, who was also a gifted literary critic, wrote highly favorable reviews of almost all of Eliade's early novels, and even some of his studies of religion, such as a French review of the French edition of Eliade's book on Yoga.[136] On the basis of these numerous and penetrating reviews, one may well decide that he was the most erudite literary critic of Eliade's novels in the thirties. In return, Eliade took—to a certain extent and in a courageous manner—Sebastian's side against Nae Ionescu, in a period when both Christians and Jews unanimously attacked Sebastian because he had published his Jewish novel together with Ionescu's anti-Semitic preface.[137] Their friendship, however, broke over Eliade's turn to the ideology of the Iron Guard, more dramatically during the year 1937 when Sebastian started to feel, increasingly, reluctantly, and angrily, that despite their friendship, they could hardly speak to each other. From both of their journals, the strength of their friendship is obvious. It is, however, in Sebastian's journal that the most direct and sensitive observations about Eliade's speedy slide toward the extreme right are found.[138]

135. See, e.g., Mac Linscott Ricketts, "Mircea Eliade and Mihail Sebastian: The Story of a Friendship," in *Deux explorateurs de la pensée humaine: George Dumézil et Mircea Eliade*, ed. Jules Ries and Natale Spineto (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 229–43. I dare to differ from the somewhat harmonistic conclusion of a hypothetical reconciliation between Sebastian and Eliade, if Sebastian had survived and arrived in Paris. Unlike Emil Cioran and Eugène Ionesco, who did remain friendly with Eliade after 1945, as Ricketts mentions, as a Jew Sebastian has been persecuted by the Antonescu regime, a regime that in one way or another helped the other three to survive the war in convenient conditions, by paying them comfortable salaries. See Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'oubli du fascisme* (Paris: PUF, 2002). Cf. also the immediate rupture between Paul Celan and Cioran, both part of the Romanian exile in Paris, when Cioran's Fascist convictions were disclosed.

136. See the material collected in Mircea Handoca, ed., *"Dosarul" Mircea Eliade*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 1999), 41–89.

137. See Eliade's essays reprinted in ibid., 90–106.

138. See Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal de epoca* (Bucharest: Academia Romina, 2002), 114–15 (my translation).

As mentioned in the first passage quoted in this study, Eliade describes Sebastian as the only person who responded positively to his intention to marry Nina Mares in 1934. This approval does not mean, at least not automatically, that Sebastian approved the reasons Eliade decided to marry her, or that he was even aware of Eliade's arguments, which include the concept of the camouflage. However, such an awareness of Eliade's theory in general, and of his explanation in this specific case in particular, cannot be excluded. In any case, although Sebastian did not review Eliade's *Sarpele*, published in 1937 (the first of his literary writings in which the theory of camouflage is substantially discussed), I have no doubt that he read it. What is, however, a fact is that in January 1935, Sebastian reviewed, not once but twice, Eliade's collection of essays *Oceanografie*, which includes the first dated occurrence of the theory of the unrecognizability of the sacred. In the first of these reviews he writes, inter alia: "Mircea Eliade believes in a sort of mystery of banal things,[139] in their special significance."[140]

Years later, in 1943, Sebastian started to write the most famous of his literary works, a short play entitled *The Star without Name*. It was performed in Bucharest in 1944, with the author listed as Victor Mincu, a pseudonym that made it possible for Sebastian to circumvent the racial laws against the Jews, then in force in Romania. The play became an immediate and lasting success. It deals with the extreme banality of existence in a small Romanian town, where a high school professor of astronomy, Marin Miroiu, discovers an unknown star. While waiting in the rail station for the astronomical atlas that could finally confirm his discovery, Marin meets a beautiful young lady, who arrived by chance in the small town coming from a great city, fleeing from the rich ambience, and expressing the intention to commit suicide. Attempting to keep her alive overnight, he brings her to his modest house and tells her about his astronomical discovery. The lady, Mona, is surprised and has her first meaningful sight of the starred heaven. Listening to his passionate description of astronomy, she falls in love with Marin for a few hours, though in the morning she realizes the modest conditions and the banality of life in that town, and then she leaves. During that decisive night, however, Marin describes his contemplation of heaven, a poetic passage that is hardly representative of Sebastian's more sober style in general:

> There are evenings when the entire heaven seems to me deserted, with cold and dead stars, in an absurd universe, where only we, in

139. *Lucrurile banale*. In Handoca's edition, *"Dosarul" Mircea Eliade*, vol. 2, 64, the version is *bucuriile banale*, "banal feelings of gladness," but I prefer the version of the edition of the Romanian Academy.

140. Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 302. On the same page Sebastian quotes a passage from *Oceanografie* reflecting Eliade's concern with banality.

> our great loneliness, struggle on a provincial planet, just as in a town in which there is no running water, the light does not shine, and the express trains do not stop.[141] . . . But there are evenings in which the entire heaven is replete with life . . . when on the last of the stars, if you listen attentively, you hear how forests and oceans are rustling—fantastic forests and fantastic oceans—there are evenings when heaven is full of signs and callings, as if beings who did not see each other, from one planet to another, from one star to another, seek, anticipate, and call to each other.[142]

This vision of heaven as replete with signs, and the cosmic calls someone listens to, may well be described in Eliade's terms as a cosmic hierophany and is quite reminiscent of his theory of camouflage and the need to decipher it, or the need to listen to signs,[143] as it is expressed, for example, in *The Forbidden Forest*.[144] The dramatic spiritual transformation that Mona undergoes after listening to Marin is so radical that her boyfriend, the rich Grig, who came to "rescue" her, wonders why she decides to leave him for a poor professor, about whom he remarks: "This individual has a mystery . . . and at his window miracles are taking place during the night."[145] In other words, under the banal existence of the professor, in the most remote and forgotten town, one may find someone who transcends his own banal existence and listen to calls from the universe, which change his life and are understood as miraculous and full of mystery.

I am inclined to see here the impact of Eliade's theory of the camouflage of the sacred on Sebastian's play. However, even if I am wrong, and Eliade did not influence Sebastian in that way, there is something important in what I perceive to be the affinity between the two contemporaneous apotheoses of banality, articulated in the same intellectual circle in Bucharest: in both cases there is an attempt to safeguard the value of banal existence by allowing the possibility of the intrusion of a transcendental form of existence, which turns life into a meaningful event, even if someone like Mona will have only the memory of

141. Those are problems related to the banality of existence in the town, as is clear from earlier dialogues in the play.

142. Mihail Sebastian, *Steaua fara Nume*, in *Opere Alese*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1956), 204 (my translation).

143. On hierophanies and signs, see the section with this title in Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 24–29. See also the earlier quote from Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 84–85; Eliade, *Aspects du mythe*, 174–75, dealing with nature and camouflage; and Simion, *Mircea Eliade*, 204. For "signs" in Corbin, see Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 176, in quite an Eliadean manner.

144. See Simion, *Mircea Eliade*, 224. In this limited context I cannot address the several interesting descriptions of camouflage in this rich and voluminous novel.

145. Sebastian, *Steaua fara Nume*, 224.

such a unique encounter once in her life. What had been perceived as banal existence in Romania, or in Bucharest in the thirties, invited imaginative strategies to transcend it by resorting to the assumption that extraordinary experiences were possible within banal existence, transformations that then became leading forms of Romanian literature.[146] After all, the main element that Eliade added to the idea of maya that informed his theory of camouflage was his emphasis on the banal and the special attention he asked religious persons to pay to it.

146. Sebastian's earlier play *Jocul de-a vacanta*, finished in 1936, also to a certain extent revolves around the necessity of escaping the banality of everyday life.

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# 9

# The Influence of Eastern Orthodox Christian Theology on Mircea Eliade's Understanding of Religion

*Bryan Rennie*

The apparently irrational respect for ritual and mysticism "in their own terms" that Eliade embraced is often seen as an echo of the ritualism of the Eastern Church, whose veneration of icons further appears to be a model for Eliade's notion of hierophany. In 1963 Thomas Altizer claimed that "we must take account of Eliade's roots in Eastern Christendom . . . one can sense in Eliade the Eastern Christian's hostility to the rational spirit of Western theology."[1] This claim was later amplified by Alexander Webster (1986) and Ansgar Paus (1989).[2] Eliade's youth in Orthodox Romania no doubt left indelible traces. Not having seen his schoolboy journal, I must be content with later sources, but any superficial inspection of Eliade's early writings reveals an important theological influence. Eliade openly supported the Orthodox tradition in his earliest publications and was in close contact with many others who also did so. In 1927 his "Spiritual Itinerary" makes it "evident that Eliade means to present the Orthodox religion as the supreme synthesis for which his generation is searching, and on which Romanian culture can be

1. T. J. J. Altizer, *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectics of the Sacred* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 37.

2. The articles by Paus and Webster are reproduced (the latter only in part) in Bryan Rennie, ed., *Mircea Eliade: A Critical Reader* (London: Equinox, 2006).

based."[3] One of the most obvious channels by which the influence of the Eastern Church exerted itself over Eliade's intellectual development would have been his mentor, professor, and editor, Nae Ionescu. Ricketts points out "the major role the elder man was to play in the life of the younger over the decade and a half after their meeting in 1925" when Eliade was eighteen.[4]

Ionescu was a devout Orthodox layman, who knew the works of both Greek and Latin church fathers well; "he wrote and spoke frequently on religious and theological concerns, always from the standpoint that only in the tradition of the Orthodox Church was the true spirit of Christianity preserved."[5] Ionescu spoke of an Orthodox metaphysics and even an Orthodox logic, and "Protestantism was anathema to Nae Ionescu because, in his view, it tends to turn religion into rationalism and ethics."[6] Certain specific components of Ionescu's understanding of Orthodoxy seem to have penetrated Eliade's thought. For example, Ionescu used the trope of love as a means of cognition.

> It is probable that Eliade's ideas concerning love as expressed in certain of his novels, especially, are shaped not only by the orthodoxy in which he was reared, but more particularly in its interpretation in the lectures and writings of Nae Ionescu. One Romanian interpreter of Eliade's works has stated that "love as an instrument of knowledge" is a fundamental theme of Eliade's novels.[7]

Assuming that Ionescu was at least one major channel through which Orthodox theological thought worked its influence over Eliade, we need to consider how that thought was manifest in other early writings. Reading Eliade's "Between Apollo and Isis" (*Cuvântul*, March 18, 1927, 1–2), the "Spiritual Itinerary" (*Cuvântul*, September 6 to November 16, 1927), and the "Apology for Virility" (*Gândirea*, August–September 1928, 352–59), Ricketts came to the conclusion that "for him, Christianity—Orthodoxy—is a 'mystical' religion, affording man direct contact with the deity."[8] Eliade affirms that "it cannot be that the soul of any elite will not arrive at Christianity after it has been tried by experiences" (*Cuvântul*, 16 November 16, 1927, 1–2).[9] Ricketts considers another

3. Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), vol. 1, 261.

4. Ibid., 123.

5. Ibid., 100, 111.

6. Ibid., 101.

7. Virgil Ierunca, in Joseph Kitagawa and Charles Long, eds., *Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), cited in Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 109.

8. Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 184–85.

9. Ibid., 263.

essay, "Theos éghènou . . ." (*Gândirea*, December 1927),[10] to represent Eliade's most elaborate statement of the Christian faith. It is an essentially Orthodox view, presenting salvation as the "divinization" or "deification" of man with emphasis on deliverance from death rather than from sin. Christianity, for Eliade at this time, is a "Christ mysticism" and a heroic way of life.[11] This was Eliade's first article to be published in the monthly *Gândirea*, a journal of Orthodoxy and culture, and the strange Greek title, "Theos éghènou . . ." is a part of a longer quotation meaning, "Out of man you have been born god." To "become a god" has been humanity's objective, Eliade says here, ever since we transcended the animal state of having only physiological drives. "Consciousness," the young Eliade contends, "is only a bridge for crossing over to the true spiritual worlds." These worlds cannot be conceived by everyday reason; they can be known only through *experience*. Apart from experience of spiritual realms, existence is meaningless, since "everyday consciousness . . . is a bundle of sensations, sentiments, and ideas which have *no meaning in themselves*."[12] He refers to the idea of becoming god as transcending the "humiliating psycho-physical causality" of existence and attaining immortality.[13] Eliade later perceived the same thing in Hindu Yoga and then in all religion. He continues, affirming that

> Christianity . . . put spiritual experience and therefore salvation within the reach of everyone. . . . Christ was a real person, whereas Dionysus was a mythical god. . . . The Incarnation has made salvation (immortality, divinization) possible for man; the individual makes it effective by "attachment to the Christic essence," by experience rather than reason, and by imitation of Christ: "The imitation of Christ is the secret of salvation."[14]

In the August–September issue of *Gândirea* another writer, Nichifor Crainic, published "The Manifesto of the White Lily." Eliade's reaction to this manifesto reveals a revision of his position on several points, including "his understanding of Orthodoxy and the religious experience it represents."[15] This revision Ricketts attributes, in part, to "the counsel of Nae Ionescu. . . . But perhaps even more important than Nae Ionescu's influence was that of some new friends Eliade acquired in the last year at the university: Mircea Vulcănescu (b. 1904) and Paul Sterian (b. 1904) . . . Stelian Mateescu [and] Sandu Tudor

10. Ibid., 355–57.
11. Ibid., 269.
12. "Theos éghènou . . . ," quoted in Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 267.
13. Ibid., 268. From "Theos éghènou. . . ."
14. Ibid.
15. Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 287.

(1889–1966)."[16] However, I would add that Eliade's interaction with Şerban Ciocolescu would justify the latter's appearance on this list also. The others were not only better acquainted with Orthodox theology than Eliade was but heavily committed to or supportive of it, which Ciocolescu was not.

There can be no doubt that Eliade was a Romanian of Eastern Orthodox background and a product of his own experiences. But this sketch of his early writings does not conclusively reveal any specific effects of the theological influence on Eliade. Perhaps a consideration of his later, more developed theoretical understanding of religion in specific relation to Eastern Orthodox doctrine might shed more light on such effects. Alexander Webster's essay directly relates Eliade's later thought to Orthodox theology. It "seeks to determine the parameters for a phenomenological description of 'religion' that might at once reflect and inform the Orthodox mystical tradition"[17] and seeks this in Eliade's works. While "the philosophical psychology of Rudolf Otto is deemed amenable to the theological/metaphysical aspects of Orthodox mysticism . . . the phenomenological dualism of Mircea Eliade proves useful to a fuller understanding of the liturgical qualities of Orthodox mysticism."[18] Webster attempts to bridge the gap between Orthodox theology and the history of religions using Eliade's thought. Based on the theology of Vladimir Lossky (which I will later compare explicitly to Eliade's thought), Webster points out that the Orthodox tradition is essentially and not merely tangentially "mystical." Lossky denied any sharp distinctions in Eastern Christianity between mysticism and theology, or "between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church."[19] This is certainly one of the consonances between Orthodox theology and Eliade's thought. Eliade always emphasized the experiential origins of the human encounter with the sacred.

Webster continues:

> For his description of the numinous experience to achieve maximum utility for an Orthodox theologian, Otto's perspective on mysticism would have to be reformulated so as to afford mysticism a more central role in religion, and the dynamic and communal dimensions of the numinous experience would require attention or the complement of another theoretical approach to religion. A step in the latter direction is forthcoming in the following section [on Eliade]. [In] *The*

16. Ibid., 289.

17. Alexander F. C. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition and the Comparative Study of Religion: An Experimental Synthesis," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23 (1986): 621–49; also in Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 404–10.

18. Ibid., 621.

19. Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), quoted in Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 628.

> *Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade employed a "negative" methodology that may be likened to the apophatic ways of Orthodoxy.[20]
> So striking, in fact, are the parallels between Orthodox liturgical (and theological) mysticism and Eliade's depiction of the "archaic" religious person that one may wonder whether Eliade truly captured in words the structures of archaic and developed religion or allowed his own Romanian Orthodox upbringing to form his perceptions to an extent far greater than he would have admitted![21]

Webster gives five examples to validate this point: (1) "Eliade's insightful analysis of the sacredness of nature and cosmic religion includes a highly informed 'paradigmatic history of baptism' with surprisingly numerous quotations from various church Fathers. . . . Eliade argued that . . . 'Certain fathers of the primitive Church had seen the value of correspondence between the symbols advanced by Christianity and the symbols that are the common property of mankind.'"[22] (2) "Eliade's vigorous critique of 'desacralization' is structurally homologous to the Orthodox critique of 'secularism.'"[23] (3) "The key concept of hierophany as the 'act of manifestation of the sacred' is broad enough to encompass 'elementary' forms of 'the manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object' as well as 'the supreme hierophany (which, for a Christian, is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ).'"[24] Furthermore, "This explicit hierarchy of types of hierophanies also displays strong logical affinities to the epiphanic theme in Orthodox dogmatic and liturgical theology."[25] (4) "Eliade's discussion of cosmogony . . . offered as the crowning example the dome-surmounted square Byzantine church architecture: 'As "copy of the cosmos," the Byzantine church incarnates and at the same time sanctifies the world.'"[26] And (5) "Eliade's emphasis on the religious person's thirst for being and life as opposed to non-being and death—above all, his or her desire 'to transfigure his existence, to make it like its divine model' . . . In Orthodoxy . . . this emphasis on ontological wholeness and opposition to death is absolutely fundamental and tends to

20. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 636; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 405.

21. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 639; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 407.

22. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 136. Also see Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 639; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 407.

23. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 639; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 407.

24. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 11. Also in Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 639–40; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 408.

25. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 640; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 408.

26. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 58, and esp. 61–62. Also in Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 640; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 408.

distance Orthodox theology from its Western Christian counterparts."[27] Webster continues with the observation that "one need only allow for the primarily historical instead of mythical basis of Orthodox liturgical mysticism before adopting Eliade's approach to religion in its entirety!"[28]

Ansgar Paus adds to Webster's general observations the specific claim that he is able to show that his [Eliade's] methodology is linked with a special theological interpretation of the Byzantine theory of icons.[29] Paus argues that "for Eliade the 'sacred' is, in the final reckoning, a transcendental reality."[30] Another central component of Paus's argument is the refusal of "rational discursive analysis" by the Orthodox tradition, in favor of an alternative "aesthetic" and "intuitive" approach,[31] and he claims to demonstrate that the key to understanding the whole of Eliade's religious, historical material "lies in theology, or, to put it more precisely, in Byzantine Icontheology."[32]

In Eliade's "eclectically focused gifts for synthesis,"[33] Paus sees the pronounced influence of the Eastern church, although he grants that "Eliade did not intend to offer any specifically Christian theological interpretation of the innumerable images and symbols which the history of religions represents."[34] Paus nonetheless goes on to make an equation of the image (ειχώυ) with Eliade's notion of hierophany. He draws heavily and understandably on Eliade's *Images and Symbols* and equates the Orthodox understanding of the function of icons with Eliade's understanding of the operation of hierophany: (1) "An image or an ειχώυ ('hierophany') is not itself God in his essence ('sacrum') . . . no identity of essence exists." However, (2) "Images are . . . a suitable pragmatic means for the illustration of theological content which is incapable of being circumscribed." And (3) "An image, a statue or an icon is a material, terrestrial or cosmic receptacle for divine power, energy or life . . . it is present at the actual moment in the material." Finally, (4) the justification of this theology lies in the doctrine of the Incarnation. "This '*coincidentia oppositorum*' represents the christological foundation of the theology of icons." Thus, "The Orthodox icon bears the character of a theophany and finds in that its justification. It leads the beholder through itself and, by its presence, to community or union (*communio*) with transcendent

27. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 640; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 408.

28. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 642; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 410.

29. Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 392.

30. Ansgar Paus, "The Secret Nostalgia of Mircea Eliade for Paradise: Observations on Method in the Study of Religion," *Religion* 19 (1989): 138; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 393.

31. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 140; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 395.

32. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 141; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 396.

33. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 139; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 394.

34. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 142–43; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 398.

reality."[35] However, a potential problem seems to be that Paus is not distinguishing between "tokens of a real presence" and "the breakthrough of a spiritual power, which . . . is present at the actual moment in the material."[36] Where the Orthodox understanding of icons embraces the former, Eliade proposes the latter, at least as it is believed and experienced in the life-world of the believer. Eliade's emphatic insistence that anything at all could become a hierophany in the lived experience of *homo religiosus* again deviates from the Byzantine understanding in which the icon has to partake of very precise characteristics of form and content.

Thus when Paus concludes that Eliade "suggested that the Byzantine doctrine of icons, in its fusion with the outlook on life of the Romanian husbandman, reflected the state of consciousness of archaic man,"[37] he both goes beyond the textual sources (Eliade nowhere actually *says* this) and ignores non-Christian examples of similar instantiations of the divine, which Eliade specifically elucidates. It remains, I think, true that "Eliade bestows on his methodological approach to the history of religions not only a strong theological accent but also reconstructs a special 'Theology.'"[38] Paus refers to Eliade's musing[39] "whether one had understood the hidden message of the book, 'the theology' that is implied in the history of religions, as I myself understand and interpret it."[40] But he has not, I feel, established that this "theology" is purely and simply Byzantine. Thus he goes too far in claiming that Eliade's "'creative hermeneutics' is developed *under the control* of a special theological a priori."[41] An inspection of Eliade's autobiographical sources has not revealed any such particular focus, although it has not disproved this claim, as Romanian Christianity would certainly have been pervasive even in the life of a young, modernist intellectual. Paus's understanding of Eliade's "personal religious acquaintance with holy icons"[42] is based on one single passage from Eliade's diary (September 27, 1946) in which Eliade claims that for the Eastern Orthodox, "our icons have protected us from the fetishism of anthropomorphic images."[43] From this Paus concludes that Eliade "can therefore be classified as a secularized mystic of Byzantine Christianity," and that his "literary and scientific works on religion emanate from personal

35. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 143–44, Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 398–99.

36. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 144; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 399.

37. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 144; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 399.

38. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 144; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 399.

39. In Mircea Eliade, *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957–1969*, trans. Fred H. Johnson Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 74. Also published as *Journal II, 1957–1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

40. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 144; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 399–400.

41. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 145; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 400, emphasis added.

42. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 145; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 400.

43. Mircea Eliade, *Journal I, 1945–1955*, trans. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 29.

religious experience."[44] While I find this fascinating and useful, it appears to be overly narrow and to spring from a desire to find closure and have the last word on a subject that should remain open until much more work is done.

Perhaps I can carry that work forward to some extent by an inspection of the works of Vladimir Lossky, just four years Eliade's senior, who is often said to be one of the most eloquent and reliable expositors of Orthodox theology. His *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* has been said to be "one of the finest expression of authentic spirituality ever written."[45] Perhaps similarities, consonances, or homologies (I can think of no better term to describe these suggestive similarities between Eliade's thought and Orthodoxy) can be found between Lossky's and Eliade's writings that would be instructive. I have already referred to homologies between the Orthodox emphasis on mysticism and Eliade's emphasis on authentic lived experience; between the Orthodox veneration of icons and Eliade's notion of hierophany; between Orthodox synthesis and Eliade's eclectic understanding; between the irrationality of ritual and Eliade's emphasis upon the transrational. Inspection of Lossky reveals seven homologies or consonances with Eliade's writings: (1) As has already been mentioned, the Orthodox tradition is essentially "mystical" according to Lossky.[46] This is consonant with Eliade's emphasis on the experiential origins of the human encounter with the sacred. (2) Eliade and Orthodox theology share a strong emphasis on Human universalism—"Only one nature exists, common to all men, although it appears to us fragmented by sin, parceled out among many persons. This original unity of nature, re-established by the Church, appeared to the Apostle Paul so complete . . . [that] men possess a single common nature in many human persons."[47] Lossky's theology speaks to the universal human condition, and this is a position that Eliade shared. (3) There is also the aforementioned homology of Eliade's idea of hierophany with Orthodox theology. "The direct foundation of theological teaching is the Incarnation of the Word—just as it is for iconography. Since the Word has incarnated Himself, the Word can be thought and taught—and in the same way the Word can be painted."[48] Eliade's notion of hierophany—that the sacred must

44. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 146; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 401.

45. Ian Kesarcodi-Watson, "Foreword," in Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 7. Limitations of time and space prohibit a similar inspection of Eliade's compatriot Dumitru Stăniloae, who is an equally recognized Orthodoxy theologian. See Bryan Rennie, "Mircea Eliade's Understanding of Religion and Eastern Christian Thought," in *Centers and Peripheries in the Christian East: Papers from the Second Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Eastern Christian History and Culture*, ed. Eugene Clay, Russell E. Martin, and Barbara Skinner (Ohio State University Press, forthcoming).

46. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 8.

47. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 125.

48. Ibid., 13.

first be manifest in some concrete, physical form (which simultaneously conceals it in a profane form), accessible to human experience, before it can be thought, taught, apprehended, appreciated, and so forth, is obviously similar. (4) Lossky's use of the language of *coincidentia oppositorum* is another common element—"to find reality, one must think being and non-being together. . . . The living God must be evoked beyond the opposition of being and non-being, beyond all concepts."[49] Such language could easily have inspired Eliade's understanding of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. (5) Lossky says that "knowledge of divine nature is achieved and canceled out simultaneously in the impersonality of unknowing,"[50] which is further reminiscent of Eliade's pervasive theme of the revelation and camouflage of the sacred. (6) Eliade's understanding of freedom as the goal of all religious striving parallels the Orthodox concept of freedom and salvation. That "God has become man that man might become God"[51] encapsulates the goal of Orthodox freedom and salvation: "We must 'become partakers of the divine nature,'"[52] which is "the path to deification."[53] Eliade's "immortality and freedom" from *Yoga, Immortality, and Freedom* seems to have closely assimilated this deification. Finally, (7) the "narrative logic" of the Eastern church seems to be the kind of logic that Eliade apprehended in all "systems" of symbols and myths. Lossky insists that only poetry can evoke the life of the hidden God, and Eliade's creative hermeneutics is a *poetic* hermeneutics, an interpretation involving literary or narrative creativity.

All this evidence amounts to a considerable series of homologies between Eliade's work and Orthodox theology. Surely the case is almost complete for a recognition of Orthodox theology as the foundation of Eliade's understanding of religion? However, in addition to these consonances, there are considerable dissonances. The Orthodox emphasis on the *personal* nature of God is something foreign to Eliade's expressions of the sacred. One must also wonder where sacrifice is in Eliade. And where is the Trinity? Where are the forces of evil? The scholars who made the earliest comparisons of Eliade and Orthodox theology had reservations. Altizer said that "in Mircea Eliade, Christian theology is confronted by a . . . vision of the sacred . . . *incompatible* with the established forms and traditions of Christianity."[54] Despite Ionescu's influence over Eliade, it is apparent that Eliade diverged from his professor in many ways. Eliade names theology as a "monomania," a single perspective "which explains

49. Ibid., 23.
50. Ibid., 28.
51. Ibid., 92, 137, attributed to Irenaeus, also in Athanasius, and common to later theologians.
52. Ibid., 92, quoting 2 Peter 1:4.
53. Ibid., 137.
54. Altizer, *Dialectics of the Sacred*, 15, emphasis added.

everything from its particular point of view" such as the "materialistic interpretation of history, Freudianism, biology, theology, magic, individualism, etc."[55]

Both Webster and Paus express problems and reservations. It is a basic discrepancy between Webster and Eliade that Webster, as an Orthodox theologian, agrees with Ionescu that "within the Orthodox tradition alone may the person seeking after the ultimate meaning of life realize his or her goal,"[56] whereas it is fundamental to Eliade's thought that the sacred is revealed in all traditions. I would suggest that allowing this from the perspectives of all positions claiming revelation must be *rationally* grounded, despite emphasis on the "transrational." Furthermore, Webster speaks of *Otto's* "unmitigated emphasis on the experiential dimension of religion, particularly in terms of the nonrational."[57] So there is no necessity to trace any irrationalist element of Eliade's thought to Orthodoxy. For Otto, too, "any description of the numinous experience . . . partakes . . . of a process of reification that would tend to obfuscate the reality in question."[58] So Eliade's understanding of the camouflage of the sacred in the profane need not be traced to Orthodox theology, either.

Rather than claiming that Eliade derived his understanding *from* Orthodox theology, Webster traces the influence in the other direction. He offers the example of Father Alexander Schmemann as one who was influenced *by* Eliade. And Webster's conclusion that "one need only allow for the primarily historical instead of mythical basis of Orthodox liturgical mysticism before adopting Eliade's approach to religion in its entirety!"[59] is a very significant *distinction* from Eliade, who polemicized vigorously *against* historicism.

From an author with Webster's theological motivation it is hardly surprising to find the affirmation of his tradition's influence over Eliade, but what is the *extent* of that influence? That Eliade's thought can be *used by* Orthodox theology does not mean that it entirely *originated from* Orthodoxy theology. Webster recognized that "Eliade . . . employed a metaphysical agnosticism in his writings." Although Eliade's sacred "leaves room for someone with more metaphysical certitude to objectify the 'real' as the 'numen' or 'God,'" Eliade "showed less concern for the nature of that sacred reality than for the attitudes and the behavior of the people who believe in it."[60] It is very significant that this focus on *the attitudes and behavior of the people who believe in the sacred*, rather than on

55. Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 610, 1332n14, from "Simple Presupuneri," *Cuvântul*, February 11, 1933, reprinted in *Oceanografie*, 221.

56. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 624.

57. Ibid., 627, referring to Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 7.

58. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 627.

59. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 642; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 410.

60. Webster, "Orthodox Mystical Tradition," 636–37; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 405.

the sacred per se, is apparent to Webster, who studied Eliade carefully and who *is* committed to a theological stance.

A passage by Eliade on the veneration of the *lingam* by tribal peasant women[61] has interesting implications. Ricketts comments that Eliade, "seeing how the *lingam* . . . could evoke religious sentiments on the part of women and girls in India, . . . was able to understand the veneration of icons in Orthodox churches—something he had regarded previously as 'idolatry.'"[62] Despite his earlier support for Orthodoxy, Eliade had not actually sympathized until then with one of its most deeply held beliefs and widely practiced rituals, the veneration of icons. It was Eliade's understanding of Hindu veneration that made possible his understanding of his own tradition. This must moderate the explanatory power of Paus's insistent position on the influence of Orthodox icontheology. Paus goes too far in claiming that Eliade's "'creative hermeneutics' is developed under the control of a special theological a priori."[63] An inspection of Eliade's writings does not reveal any such *control*.

For every possible Orthodox source of Eliade's theories there is also another potential source or an external corroboration. For example, Eliade's emphasis on experience as the source of salvific understanding *could* come from the mystical theology of the Eastern church, but it is also found in the Protestant Italian historian of religions Vittorio Macchioro, whom Eliade read, admired, and met in 1927. One defining feature of Orthodox theology is the deference to tradition to bridge the gulf of human ignorance, and this seems to be the one feature that Eliade decisively rejects in favor of a personal quest that builds rationally upon individual experience. Şerban Ciocolescu responded to Eliade's "Spiritual Itinerary," and Eliade thought that he had understood those articles well. Ciocolescu had little respect for the Orthodox Church. His influence may have contributed to Eliade's statement that when he had first "discovered Orthodoxy . . . it seemed to me the one dogma consistent with the Absolute I was seeking and at the same time with a collective historical experience. That is why I threw myself, body and soul, into Orthodoxy—prematurely. Now I believe I know what course I must take. And I am amazed to find that I shall have to retain much—very much—from Orthodoxy."[64] Despite this retention, it seems that after 1927 Eliade understood Orthodoxy better but accepted it less. As Ricketts states: "The essential element in Christian salvation [is] the grace of God. But

61. Mircea Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 54–60.

62. Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 362.

63. Paus, "Secret Nostalgia," 145; Rennie, *Critical Reader*, 400.

64. Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 290, from *Şantier: Roman Idirect* (Bucharest: Editură Cugetarea, 1935), 235–36.

since he himself [Eliade] was a stranger to this grace, he chose to remain on the path of adventure."[65] In his recent (2006) attempt to discern Eliade's religious beliefs from the revealing material in his *Portuguese Journal*, Ricketts points out Eliade's self-identification as "a pagan—a perfect, classical pagan—trying to make a Christian out of myself. For me, cosmic rhythms, symbols, signs, magic, sexuality—*exist* more largely and more 'immediately' than the problem of salvation."[66]

Attempted reconstructions of influence are inevitably speculative and dubious. Eliade recognized the quasi-religious nature of the quest for origins,[67] and this quest to reveal the origins of Eliade's understanding of religion becomes a "Quest for the Historical Eliade," which, like Schweitzer's *Quest for the Historical Jesus*, sees writers expressing their own positions and saying more about themselves than about their subject. There are certain questions that must be asked in the face of these objections to the "Quest for the Historical," questions about the unavoidable self-narration involved in every act of description and the creativity of hermeneutics. Do these questions imply that objective historical studies are futile and that the comparative and general study of religion should be abandoned or radically reconceived? Some have reached this conclusion—Russell McCutcheon and Daniel Dubuisson, to name but two. My conclusions are more positive. Another scholar more optimistic about the future of a comparative and general study of religion is Jeppe Sinding Jensen, and in what follows I draw on his philosophically astute and well-informed observations. Jensen attempts to reinstate the phenomenology of religion "as a species of intellectually authoritative discourse on religion as a general cultural phenomenon."[68] He does this in part by distinguishing between the "originators" and the "classical" practitioners of the phenomenology of religion and also between "two radically different conceptions of the task of the phenomenology of religion . . . 1) concerned with obtaining objective knowledge about religious traditions and producing taxonomies and typologies of religious 'phenomena' through description and classification and 2) concerned with approaching the 'subjective understanding' ('Verstehen') of the 'essence' of religion."[69] The "originators," including Chantepie de la Saussaye, Tiele, and Kristensen, are associated with the first conception of the task, whereas the "classical" phenomenologists, including Otto, van der Leeuw, Heiler, Bleeker, and Eliade, are associated with the second.

65. Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, 294.

66. Eliade's *Journal*, September 5, 1942. Translations are Ricketts's, based on a photocopy of the original manuscript. The *Portuguese Journal* is forthcoming from the State University of New York Press.

67. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (London: Harvill Press, 1960), chap. 2.

68. Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *The Study of Religion in a New Key* (Aarhus: University of Aarhus, 2003), 26.

69. Ibid., 30.

Jensen gives the "originators" of phenomenology a "benevolent reading,"[70] which improves upon the position of more "critical" scholars who so thoroughly demolish previous scholarship that they leave themselves with the task of reconstructing the foundations of their discipline. Scholarship is cumulative. While we must remain critical and avoid the mistakes of earlier scholars, we just as clearly must recognize their contributions in order to build upon them and advance. A benevolent reading of Eliade's work reveals considerable agreement between it and the restoration suggested by Jensen. With cautious reserve and philosophical precision, Jensen partially rehabilitates universals, essences, and nonreduction. He recognizes (following John Searle) the ontology of social constructions or "social facts." In this light, accusations of Eliade's universalism, essentialism, and antireduction are no longer as damning as they once seemed. The only really disqualifying criticism remaining is that Eliade is theological in the sense that he presumes the ontological autonomy of the sacred—and this is refutable. Many have accused Eliade of making this assumption, and Jensen clearly believes that Eliade's quasi-theological position disqualifies his theories from a serious academic study of religion.[71] But this is simply not consistent with specific written statements by Eliade himself, who states repeatedly that "the sacred is an element in the structure of consciousness,"[72] which may make him guilty of psychologism but not of what Jensen refers to as "transcendental realism." That is, Eliade does *not* require that the sacred be an ontologically autonomous agent, although it is constantly *apprehended* as such by religious believers. I have argued before that Eliade considers the sacred as the intentional object of worship.[73] That is to say, in Jensen's words, it is "whatever is considered sacred in a given social context."[74] As Webster recognized earlier, Eliade's focus is on "the *attitudes and behavior of the people who believe in the sacred*, rather than on the sacred *per se*."

Jensen's "benevolent reading" is an application of a "Principle of Charity" derived from Donald Davidson.[75] This is "a fundamental premise, the basic condition of the possibility of interpretation. . . . it proceeds from the axiom that all utterances, to be meaningful, must comply with coherent sets of belief and

70. Ibid., 15.

71. Ibid., 116n26, 205.

72. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), i; Eliade, "The Sacred in the Secular World," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 1 (1973): 101; Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 1; Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 1, *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, trans. Willard Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xiii.

73. Bryan Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 21.

74. Jensen, *Study of Religion*, 131.

75. Ibid., 251n62, 253n66, 281, 328, 369, 371; cf. 334, which speaks of "interpretational generosity." I cite these multiple references because Jensen's index gives only one: 369.

depend ' . . . on the existence of a fundamentally rational pattern.'"[76] "In order to understand anything . . . we are under an obligation [to] impute to actors and their discourses some contextual form of rationality."[77] I agree. Criticism "requires a commitment to discover the internal coherence, to reconstruct the meaning, to *make sense* of the objects of our interpretation *before* we reveal the self-contradictions, deconstruct, and make nonsense out of the views expressed."[78] This is also equivalent to Eliade's recognition of a logic and internal theoretical coherence to religious discourse and systems of symbols.[79] In this light, Eliade appears to be "concerned with obtaining objective knowledge about religious traditions and producing taxonomies and typologies [and morphologies] of religious 'phenomena' through description and classification," as Jensen said.[80] The conception of phenomenology as a systematic survey of the data[81] is compatible with Eliade's complementary volumes, the morphological *Patterns in Comparative Religion* and the chronological *History of Religious Ideas*.

Jensen accepts that "as different as religions and cultures may be there remain recurrent structures and features and thus a limit to diversity."[82] Eliade, of course, sought such recurrent structures as universals in the history of religions, and as Jensen has it, "the philosophical justification for phenomenology's global ambition is the conception of the unity of mankind . . ., a unity without which ethnographic and historical materials would be incomprehensible,"[83] and "without acknowledging some level of 'psychic unity' the human sciences become impossible."[84]

All this seems far from my original focus on the Orthodox Church's influence on Eliade, to which I must now return. My reluctance to concede any definitive conclusion on that issue led me to call into question the very value of that undertaking or of any similar quest to establish the historical antecedents of personal beliefs and the origins of individual theories. However, I hope that now we might be in a position more clearly to recognize that one of the most important processes involved in the academic study of religion is the attempt to

76. Jensen, *Study of Religion*, 281–82, quoting Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 6 (1990): 320.

77. Jensen, *Study of Religion*, 371.

78. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 4.

79. In an article of 1958 Eliade stated that "one must not think that theoretical coherence is necessarily the result of systematic reflection; it is already imposed at the stage of the image and the symbol, it is an integral part of mythic thought." Repeated in Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 89n1.

80. Jensen, *Study of Religion*, 30.

81. Ibid., 87.

82. Ibid., 371.

83. Ibid., 81.

84. Ibid., 421.

establish a systematic survey of the data by constructing taxonomies and typologies. This involves the fundamental realization that we can only discuss "whatever is *considered* sacred in a given social context," *the intentional object of experience apprehended as the real*.[85] It is Eliade's virtue that his idea of the sacred considers this intentional object, and that consideration finally disproves the assertion that Eastern Orthodox theology dominates his thought. Eliade's philosophical, literary, romantic, and emotional history contributed to his development easily as much as did his church. He certainly retained some elements from the Eastern Church in his understanding of a universal human nature and in the human ability to read the ideal off from the actual, but on the other hand, he rejected many other church doctrines and attempted to construct universal taxonomies in consideration of other traditions. While he admired his local tradition and seems at times to have yearned for commitment to it, he was honest enough to accept that he lacked that commitment and stood outside its theological circle. No doubt this situation gave him an advantage in appreciating those other traditions to which he did not belong. As long as "the sacred" is restricted to the intentional object of human evaluations, then other elements of Eliade's classificatory structure could also be valuably retained: hierophany, the dialectic of the sacred and profane, *illud tempus*, and so on. These provide a reliable initial foundation on which to build a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the human behavior we refer to as "religious"—as long as we maintain a critical consciousness of the *creative* nature of interpretation. (The work of Ulrich Berner and his students at the University of Bayreuth, which was presented at a session of the IAHR/EASR conference in Bucharest in 2006 was evidence of the utility of Eliade's thought beyond exclusive theological dialogue and its applicability to a variety of material, including such secular instances as prison chain gangs.)

This critical consciousness is obligatory because, alongside the attempt to construct intellectually justifiable and workable taxonomies and morphologies of religious data, there is always also a creative hermeneutics at work. Comparison, for example, is always creative or at least constructive (that is to say, it is not creation ex nihilo but is a creative organization of preexisting material). The most useful, although still limited, metaphor that I have found is that of a mosaic. The scholar collects data like colored stones to be used in a mosaic, but the arrangement of these items in patters of similarities and contrasts, set in the mortar of the scholar's editorial insertions, is necessarily creative. The process is clearly *not* like a jigsaw puzzle in which we *re*assemble given pieces into

85. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade*, 21.

their original collocations. It is therefore *not* like the (normal) hard science that Thomas Kuhn regarded as a process of puzzle solving.[86] Recognition of the narrative and creative nature of human representations and explanations of reality is becoming increasingly ubiquitous. A variety of historians,[87] as well as scholars of religion as disparate as Jeppe Jensen and Daniel Dubuisson, have incorporated it into their conclusions. To cite some of Jensen's conclusions as a philosophically informed example: "The role of 'narrativity' in our scientific understanding of the world is yet another underrated issue,"[88] and "the narrative aspects of explanation become much more noticeable: explanations are 'stories.'"[89] Eliade anticipated this contemporary appreciation of the creative powers of narrative[90] when, for example, he said that "a literary work is an instrument of knowledge. The imaginary universes created in novels, stories, and tales reveal certain values and meanings unique to the human condition which, without them, would remain unknown, or, at the very least, imperfectly understood" (*Journal* III, 283). Jensen's analysis of narrativity begins to explain *why* this is the case, and respect for the data of religious traditions requires that scholars recognize that religious representations create for their believers worlds in which human subjects are transformed, elevated, or "saved." That is, they do have immediate revelatory and inspirational qualities for their adherents.

Eliade made a distinction between his "diurnal" or "scientific" work and his "nocturnal" or "artistic" work (his fictional literature), but he insisted, "Il n'existe pas de véritable solution de continuité entre mes ouvrages scientifiques et mon oeuvre littéraire, entre le règle diurne de l'esprit et son règle nocturne."[91] He saw no final *solution de la continuité entre* story and history. This observation is not original to Eliade—Benedetto Croce subsumed history under the general concept of art and saw art as a kind of knowledge, and the historians Hayden

86. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 35–42.

87. See Bryan Rennie, "*Il n'y a pas un Solution de la Continuité*: Eliade, Historiography, and Pragmatic Narratology in the Study of Religion," *ARC: The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies*, McGill University 30 (2002): 115–37; Bryan Rennie, "Religion after Religion, History after History: Postmodern Historiography and the Study of Religions," review essay of *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henri Corbin at Eranos* by Steven Wasserstrom, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* by Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* by Peter Novick, and *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* by Hayden White, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 3 (2003): 68–99.

88. Jensen, *Study of Religion*, 209n6.

89. Ibid., 232. But see also Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 201.

90. Rennie, "*Solution de la Continuité*."

91. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 7.

White and Robert Berkhofer[92] conclude that historiography is both science and art—but the value of Eliade's work is in its application of such thought to the study of religion. Orthodox theology does not appear to have exerted a dominating influence over Eliade in the sense of imposing dogmatic assumptions about the nature of the real/sacred. On the other hand, he was exposed to that church as a multimedia performative theater experienced as inducing transformation via narrative and visual representations of traditional forms. This could easily have alerted and sensitized the young Eliade to the potential of such representation as an experience that can influence its audience so as to induce their apprehension of (that is, to "reveal") the "real," "the sacred" in historical data (or *what is considered*, or more accurately what is *apprehended*, as the real/sacred).

As well as the systematic arrangement of data into utilizable taxonomies, these creative narrative processes are always under way in religion and in its study, exercising a practical influence on our audiences, resonating with their narrative world-constructions. It may have been Eliade's creative narrative skill that ensured his popularity as a contemporary author while his relative weakness in taxonomic formation left him open to criticism from more prosaically minded scholars. He may have first developed his narrative skill in the Orthodox Church of his youth, but he also saw it practiced in the various "archaic" traditions of the world. We will never be able to establish narrative universes as physical facts, but the stories or histories that we construct, although they may produce multiple worlds, and multiple Eliades, can nonetheless "reveal the real" and clarify our world by their telling.

92. See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Robert F. Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

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# 10

# The Eternal Deferral

*Jonathan Z. Smith*

As I sit at my work table drafting this essay, I face a wall's-length, floor-to-astragalus-high bookcase jammed with reference works. Its uppermost shelf, the one that comes into view each time my pencil pauses and I reach for a cigarette, holds what I own of the works of James George Frazer and Mircea Eliade: some five and a half feet of the distinctive green bindings of the former, nearly eight feet of the latter. Over the years of gazing at this horizon, I have come to take their industry for granted; their audacity, their encyclopedic ambition, never fail to astound me.

Six and a half years ago, when I presented two lectures at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the original French publication of Eliade's *Traité d'histoire des religions*, later appearing in an inadequate English translation as *Patterns in Comparative Religion*,[1] I had intended them

1. J. Z. Smith, "Acknowledgments: Morphology and History in Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1949–1999)," pts. 1 and 2, *History of Religions* 39 (2000): 315–31, 332–51; reprinted in J. Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 61–79, 80–100. All references will be to this latter reprinting.

In referencing *Traité*, the pagination, in parentheses, will be given first to the original French printing, Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Paris: Payot, 1949), and then to the original printing of the English translation, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958). I have revised or corrected the English translation in nearly every quotation. With reference to the initial topic of this essay, the promised second volume to *Traité*, I have retained Sheed's translation of Eliade's "le volume complémentaire" as the "companion volume" in my discussion as it has entered the critical literature on Eliade, but I have employed the cognate formation, "complementary volume," when translating Eliade's French text.

to be my final public reflections on Eliade's enterprise. The subsequent preparation of an introduction to the Princeton University Press's centennial 2005 reprinting of Eliade's *Myth of the Eternal Return*, and a 2005 University of Chicago college seminar on *Patterns* were pedagogical occasions that did not violate this intention. Then the invitation came to contribute to this gathering, an institutional endeavor that trumped individual proclivity, leaving open only the question of what to address, hedged with the private stipulation that it must force some new effort at critical understanding of one of Eliade's works, rather than a return, a repetition, of efforts already made. Fortunately, Mac Linscott Ricketts unintentionally gave me my assignment.

## I

There is, to the best of my knowledge, no other North American scholar with so wide an acquaintance with the totality of Eliade's published and unpublished works than Ricketts, and so it was with profound gratitude and keen anticipation that I received from him an offprint of his article "The Tangled Tale of Eliade's Writing of *Traité d'histoire des religions*," published in *Archaeus*, the journal of the Romanian Association for the History of Religions, in 2000.[2] Ricketts's contribution greatly expands our understanding of the compositional history of *Patterns*, with important corrections and additions[3] to the brief account I had given in my first lecture, although he was unable to shed further light on the circumstances that led to the flawed English translation.[4] Of greater interest to me was the second, and shorter, section of the article[5] in which Ricketts sharply criticizes my judgment, in the conclusion to the first lecture, that the "companion volume," promised in *Patterns*, cannot be identified "with the awkward, multi-volume, unfinished production of Eliade's last years, the *History of Beliefs and of Religious Ideas*."[6] Ricketts writes:

> There can be no question, however, that it *is* this multi-volume work that was, in Eliade's eyes, the sequel to his *Traité*. . . . Smith, of

2. Mac Linscott Ricketts, "The Tangled Tale of Eliade's Writing of *Traité d'histoire des religions*," *Archaeus: Études d'histoire des religions* 4, no. 4 (2000): 51–77. I should note that this article prompted an exchange of several letters between Ricketts and myself, including some extracts from the unpublished journals kindly translated and provided by him. I have the text of a supplementary note by Ricketts, "Straightening Some 'Tangles' in the Tale of *Traité*," submitted by him to *Archaeus*, but I have not, as yet, seen a printed version.

3. Ricketts, "Tangled Tale," 51–72.

4. Ibid., 71n5.

5. Ibid., 72–77.

6. Smith, *Relating Religion*, 73.

> course, did not have access to the full text of Eliade's *Journal*, but if it should ever be published, it would be seen that *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses* was without a shadow of a doubt the "second volume," and that he put his heart and soul into the writing of it.[7]

I accept, on the basis of the materials Ricketts prints, that Eliade thought it so, *or came to think it so.* This acceptance of Eliade's judgment, whether it was prospective or retrospective, entails an obligation: to reread the *History* in its entirety (something I had not done since the 1980s) in an effort to understand critically its project as well as its relation to Eliade's initial promises, made decades earlier, of a future "companion volume" to *Patterns*.

Before reporting on such a rereading, it would be well to remind ourselves of Eliade's public descriptions of this promised work. For the purposes of this essay, I set aside Eliade's private musings, in published and unpublished journal entries and in occasional interviews (especially the important 1977 Romanian conversation cited by Ricketts).[8]

This limits our survey to two contemporaneous sources: *Patterns* (1949)[9] and *Shamanism* (1951).[10] In *Patterns*, the references to the future work frame the volume, being clustered, with only rare exceptions,[11] at the beginning and end of the book; in *Shamanism*, all references are confined to Eliade's introductory matter. I quote the major descriptions in the order of their appearance:

> 1. Having reviewed a sufficient number of such documents [concerning hierophanies], we will be in a position to take up in a future work other problems of the history of religions: "divine forms," the relations between man and the sacred, the manipulation of the sacred (rituals, etc. . . .), magic and religion, ideas concerning the soul and death,

7. Ricketts, "Tangled Tale," 74–75, emphasis in original.

8. Ibid., 76. The relevant references to the published materials are cited in Smith, "Acknowledgments," 72–73, with a theoretical assist from Carlo Ginsburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), x–xii. The fuller collection, including unpublished materials, is cited and quoted in Ricketts, "Tangled Tale," 72–76, including the extracts Ricketts translated from Eliade's interview with Monica Lovinescu, *Întrevederi cu Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu, Ştefan Lupaşcu, şi Grigore Cugler* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1992), 97–98, *non vidi*, where Eliade describes the *History* as "not a continuation but a complementary volume. I announced in the preface to *Traité* . . . that I would write a complementary volume, which would be presented chronologically. . . . Therefore, with the *Histoire* . . . I am keeping my promise of almost thirty years ago, to give the complementary volume, that is, in time, in duration" (Ricketts, "Tangled Tale," 76). As demonstrated by the seven quotations that follow, this is a minimal reading of Eliade's "promise."

9. See note 1, above.

10. Mircea Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951); Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964), 76. Note that the English is an "enlarged and revised" edition of the French. In citing the work, I provide, in parentheses, first the pagination of the French first edition, and then that of Trask's superb English translation. In quoting both *Patterns* and *Shamanism*, all emphases are in the original.

11. E.g., Eliade, *Patterns*, 29/17.

consecrated persons (priest, magician, king, initiate, etc. . . .), the relations that exist between myth, symbol and ideogram, the possibility of grounding a history of religions, etc. . . . .[12]

2. At the limit, an object that becomes a symbol tends to coincide with the *Whole,* just as the hierophany tends to incorporate the sacred in its totality. . . . This "imperialism" of religious "forms" will assert itself even more clearly in the complementary volume we will devote to these "forms."[13]
3. When we take up, in the complementary volume, the articulations and functions of rites, we will have an opportunity to show the mechanism by which physiological and psychological activities transform themselves into ritual activities.[14]
4. These cases of resistance [to the sacred] which will be analyzed in the complementary volume, reveal, to some degree, the attraction exercised by "history" . . . the growing importance which the values of human life seek to acquire, especially in the "evolved" religions, in the first rank of which one must place the inclination of that life *to be in history* and *to make history*. . . .[15]
5. In the complementary volume we will have to examine how far "history" is susceptible to being sacralized and to what degree religious values have been historicized. . . . In this present volume [*Patterns*] we have avoided studying religious phenomena in their historical perspective, we limited ourselves to treating them in and of themselves, [that is to say] to know them insofar as they are hierophanies.[16]
6. All these apparently contradictory movements of unification and of fragmentation, of identification and of separation, of attraction and of resistance or repulsion, etc. will come to be more easily grasped when, having examined the diverse techniques for approaching and manipulating the sacred (prayers, offerings, rites, etc.) we can attack the problem of the *history* of religious phenomena. We have reserved this study for the complementary volume.[17]
7. In the last analysis, it is for the historian of religions to synthesize all the studies of particular aspects of shamanism and to present a comprehensive view which shall be at once a morphology and a history of this complex religious phenomenon. But an understanding must be

12. Ibid., 13/xiii.
13. Ibid., 385/452.
14. Ibid., 393/460.
15. Ibid., 393–94/461.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 395/463.

> reached concerning the importance to be accorded to "history" in this type of investigation. As we have said more than once elsewhere, and as we shall have occasion to show more fully in the complementary volume (in preparation) to *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, although the historical conditions are extremely important in a religious phenomenon (for every human datum is in the last analysis an historical datum) they do not wholly exhaust it.[18]

What can be generalized from these citations as to Eliade's early published characterizations of the "companion volume" to *Patterns?* Taking them together with their contexts, two major goals are proposed.

The first (items 1, 4–5, 7) is that the promised work would display the necessary concomitant to Eliade's morphological approach and ontological grounding of hierophanies in *Patterns*. That is to say, the "companion volume" would provide a historical interpretation—ideally of the very same data—now grounded in their concrete historical situations. In Eliade, various notions of the historical enterprise are invoked, along with both positive and negative evaluations. At the most minimalist level, history is interpreted as chronology, or as the accidental. With more complexity, Eliade, at times, proposes attention to the dynamics of religious persistence and change, often entailing a critique of the "modernist" view of the grounding of human existence in the historical, the view that "man makes himself." This latter foundational attack on the status of the historical often leads the reader of Eliade's work to assume in Eliade a procedural refusal of the historical as well. As with C. Lévi-Strauss in *Mythologiques*, the charge that Eliade is ahistorical ignores his adoption of a spatial rather than a temporal understanding of historical process, a matter of diffusion rather than of development, for which Eliade (though certainly not Lévi-Strauss) often deploys, especially in *Patterns*, the language of "culture circles" and the like.[19] In light of this goal, one would expect the "companion volume" to contain a measure of explicit methodological reflection on the

18. Eliade, *Shamanism*, 9/xiii–xiv. Here, this passage is followed by an important Altaic illustration of Eliade's understanding of the relations of morphological to historical modes of analysis (with the latter almost always entailing a *Kulturkreislehre*-style diffusionism). See my discussion of this illustration in Smith, *Relating Religion*, 93–94. In the same articles I proposed, as an alternative to identifying the *History of Religious Ideas* as the promised "companion volume," the suggestion that "we have three chapters of what this companion volume might have comprised: the two monographs, *Shamanism* and *Yoga*, and the briefer sketch, *The Forge and the Crucible*"; *Relating Religion*, 79. See, further, *Relating Religion*, 79n47: "Even if these suggestions as to the [three chapters of the] 'companion volume' prove unconvincing, I would note that it has long been my practice to set aside any study that claims to be a treatment of Eliade's project which is not centered on these four foundational works—*Patterns, Shamanism, Yoga, The Forge and the Crucible*—and relies, instead, on his essays, published lectures, and more occasional writings."

19. Eliade introduces the topic of *Kulturkreis* at the conclusion to the preface of *Patterns* in the course of explaining his French title. *Traité*, he writes, is a work of history of religions to the degree that it "introduces the

historical in relation to the morphological approach, along the lines forecast in the foreword to *Shamanism*.

The second goal is no less ambitious. Eliade signals (items 1–3, 6) that, in the "companion volume," he will shift perspective from the onto-theological project of *Patterns* to one that focuses on the anthropological, that is to say, on human activities (e.g., rites, symbols, religious specialists) and "religious 'forms'"—Eliade's persistent use of sanitary pips surrounding this term indicates that these are manifestations whose formation is governed by historical forces and particular situations, rather than morphological processes of growth, transformation, and degradation (such as those processes listed in item 6). Again, one would expect the "companion volume" to provide methodological clarification as to these relations between historical and morphological processes. Eliade did provide a forecast as to what such an alteration in perspective from the ontological to the anthropological might entail in the contemporaneous *Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949). Here, the notion of "hierophany" is confined to a single introductory paragraph before Eliade announces, "Now let us pass on to human acts," a turn that continues for the remainder of the work.[20]

Rather than these more reflexive agenda, when one takes up the *History of Religious Ideas*,[21] one encounters a work that appears to have been ruefully forecast in the concluding lines to Eliade's 1956 introduction to *The Sacred and the Profane*: "This little book, then, may serve as a general introduction to the history of religions. . . . But it is not a study in the history of religions in the strict sense, for the writer, in citing examples, has not undertaken to indicate their historico-cultural contexts. To do so would have required a work in several volumes."[22]

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reader into the labyrinthine complexity of religious facts, familiarizes one with their fundamental structures and with the diversity of culture-circles in which they arise." Eliade, *Patterns*, 14/xiv–xv. Sheed here, as well as throughout her translation, fails to recognize and to translate with precision Eliade's technical vocabulary. In this instance, her translation of "et avec la diversité des cercles culturels dont ils relèvent" as "and the variety of cultures they reflect" not only misrecognizes "culture circles" but, by substituting the verb "reflect," reverses Eliade's point.

Just a few lines earlier, on the same page, Eliade had affirmed the requirement to study "hierophanies" both "morphologically" and "historically," noting, with respect to the latter, that the study "must often be extended over a great number of culture-circles differentiated in space and in time." The relevant technical term was, again, mistranslated by Sheed as "a great many cultures."

20. Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour: Archétypes et répétition* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 17–18; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1954), 3–4.

21. Mircea Eliade, *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses*, 3 vols. (Paris: Payot, 1976–83); Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 3 vols., trans. Willard R. Trask, Alf Hiltebeitel, and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979–85). In citing this work, I give first the French, then the English pagination.

22. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), 18. This sentence has remained intact since what was, in fact, its first edition, the German, *Das Heilige und das Profane: Vom Wesen des Religiösen*, trans. Ernesto Grassi (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957), 12. The first French edition, Mircea Eliade, *Le sacré et le profane*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 20, retains the sentence from the original introduction while adding a new foreword (pp. 7–11).

The *History* appears to be this "work in several volumes." However, unlike what his earlier prospective description of the work would have led his readers to expect, it is one that is strikingly devoid of explicit methodological reflection. Indeed, curiously enough for an individual who often remarked that putting data in chronological order, when preparing for a class, "makes me neurasthenic,"[23] it is chronological order, including a schema of the sequence of civilizations, that provides Eliade with the most obvious structuring principle in the *History*—a sense of flow, interrupted by "crises"—a pattern of human affairs quite parallel to the flow of undifferentiated "profane time," interrupted by "irruptions" of the sacred, revelatory displays of ontic disclosure and "transfigurations," that characterize Eliade's onto-theological writings:

> I have discussed the dialectic of the sacred and its morphology in earlier publications, from my *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958) to my little book devoted to Australian religions [1973]. . . . The present work was conceived and executed from a different point of view. On the one hand, I have analyzed the manifestations of the sacred in chronological order (but it is important not to confuse the "age" of a religious conception with the date of the earliest document that attests to it!); on the other hand, insofar as the documentation makes it possible—I have emphasized the crises in depth and, above all, the *creative moments* of the different traditions.[24]

The fairly mechanical chronological arrangement of *History* produces one provocative innovation. The work begins with a brief but suggestive set of reflections on the "opacity" of the Paleolithic data before moving on to the "Neolithic revolution" in Mesopotamia—the latter, the initial model for Eliade's category of "archaic religions." Eliade deliberately delays the introduction of the religions of traditional people ("primitives"), the religions that constitute his daring expansion of the category "archaic," until the final (alas, uncompleted) volume, on the grounds that Europeans did not become aware of them and interact with them until the "age of reconnaissance," and that, therefore, they should be placed within the context of modern religious developments, including "contemporary atheist theologies" and the "religious creativity of modern societies."[25] As an aside, I recall, after discussing this planned relocation with Eliade, suggesting to him, not entirely unseriously, that, if carried through

23. This is the form in which I recollect Eliade's sentence, repeated on a number of occasions in the late 1960s. I have seen it, somewhere in print, in a more vernacular version, ". . . I get a headache."

24. Eliade, *History*, 1:7/1:xiii–xiv, emphasis only in French.

25. Eliade, *Histoire*, 2:7; Eliade, *History*, 3:7/3:xi. As this latter citation indicates, there is a complication here. The first citation is from the preface to the French *Histoire*, 2:7 (unpaginated), which has not been translated

rigorously, this would provide an interesting way to design an introductory course: presenting religions in the order of *our* first awareness of them. This would entail, for example, that, contrary to what Eliade had done in the *History*, the Sumerians ought not to be introduced until the late nineteenth century![26]

The *History*'s diachronic chronological organization is usefully complicated by Eliade's consistent synchronic interleaving of cultures, which successfully invites what the seriality of written prose prevents, a synoptic view of cross-cultural developments that goes far beyond the usual synchrony featured in constructions of the so-called axial age, as initially formulated by Karl Jaspers, and taken up by a succession of practitioners of "world history."[27] Given Eliade's notion of "crises" and "creative moments," each period becomes, in effect, part of a series of axial ages. Thus, for example, influenced by Pirenne's 1937 thesis, chapters 33 and 34 of the *History* juxtapose "Muhammad and the Unfolding of Islam" to "Western Catholicism from Charlemagne to Joachim of Floris."[28] On the other hand, some chronological periods are too grossly conceived, by Eliade, to allow for such suggestive synchronisms. (For example, the following chapter, chapter 35, treats "Judaism from the Bar Kokhba Revolt to Hasidism"—following Eliade's dates, a span of 1,678 years). In either case, throughout the *History*, the divisions both into periods and into civilizations or

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in the English version. In the French, the projected additional volume (given as volume 3, part 2; later altered to a projected volume 4) will begin with the "discovery of the Mesoamerican religions" and extend to "contemporary atheistic theologies." The latter, I take it, refers, most particularly, to the "death of God" theologies, especially as promulgated by Eliade's student and friend Thomas J. J. Altizer. See Altizer, "Mircea Eliade and the Recovery of the Sacred," *Christian Scholar* 45 (1962): 267–89; Altizer, *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963). This conjunction is by no means accidental, as reflected in Eliade's journal entry for November 8, 1959, on the "secret message" of *Patterns*; see Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal [1945–1969]*, trans. L. Badesco (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 305.

The second citation to both versions, in context, refers to an "important section" of the final volume being "a presentation of the archaic and traditional religions of America, Africa and Oceania," as well as a concluding and related final chapter analyzing "the religious creativity of modern societies." The writing of both of these was halted by Eliade's death.

This combination of "archaic and traditional" with "modern" reflects Eliade's emphasis on creative encounters and cultural assimilations between Western traditions and the "spiritual universes" of other traditions. See, for example, Eliade's essay "Crisis and Renewal in the History of Religions" (1965), reprinted in Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 54–71, as well as the unpaginated preface to that volume.

26. As a reduction to absurdity in support of his similar caution against confusing the date of a text with the age of a tradition it contains, Eliade offers the example, "strictly applied, this method would have led to dating the German folktales at 1812–22, the date of their publication by the brothers Grimm." *History*, 1:17n4/1:7n4.

27. See, among others, the representative collection edited by S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

28. Henri Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1937). This posthumously published work has been republished in many editions and translations, nearly all of which, themselves, have been reprinted. Despite a long tradition of criticism, the work remains a "classic." See, among others, Peter Brown, "*Mohammed and Charlemagne* by Henri Pirenne," *Daedalus* 103, no. 1 (1974): 25–33. Eliade uses the Pirenne thesis to introduce

cultures are treated as conventional, self-evident, found objects, with no hint of the methodological controversies or complexities on issues such as those attendant on determining the boundaries of such units—a crucial question in undertaking intercivilizational comparisons.[29]

## II

Having made these more general observations, it seems to me a reasonable proposal for furthering the adjudication of the relations between *Patterns* and *History* in the service of assessing whether the latter should be considered the promised "companion volume," to choose one of Eliade's particular examples, one that plays an important role in both works, and attempt to compare the similarities and differences that result when the exemplum is placed within the context and design of each work.

For this experiment I have chosen Eliade's treatments of the relations between Baal and El in the Ugaritic materials and, more briefly, Eliade's use of these relations in understanding those between Baal and YHWH in the Israelitic materials. In both *Patterns* and *History*, Eliade's discussions of these figures occur relatively early in the work, thereby serving to introduce the reader to some of Eliade's characteristic preoccupations. Besides, Eliade was uncommonly proud of his labors on the Ugaritic materials. He records, in his journal for June 17, 1973, the completion of the manuscript for the section on the Ugaritic religions in the *History*, and goes on to write what I heard him say on several occasions: "I have the incontestable merit of being probably the only non-specialist to have read and reread, and that in four languages, all of the translations of the Ugaritic texts that have appeared to date, as well as all the studies that refer to them."[30] The date (1973) becomes important in assessing Eliade's use of both translated textual materials and the works of scholarship. Given that Ugaritic, a Northwest Semitic language, was first deciphered in 1930–31, the number of bibliographic items, while extensive, is necessarily more constricted than some of the other areas Eliade examines. In *Patterns*, while mentioning in his

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chapter 34 of the *History*, "Western Catholicism from Charlemagne to Joachim of Floris" (*History*, 3:94/3:86) and takes same pains to indicate his knowledge of criticisms of Pirenne's work (3:94n1; 318n266/3:86n1; 310n266).

29. Although dated in details, see the important set of meditations on these questions in Matthew Melko and Leighton R. Scott, eds., *The Boundaries of Civilizations in Space and Time* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987).

30. Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal, II: 1970–1978*, trans. Constantin Grigoresco (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 124–25; Eliade, *Journal III: 1970–1978*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 104–5.

bibliographic notes the work of two other scholars (D. Nielsen and Th. Gaster [*Patterns*: 113, 167/120, 186]), Eliade is dependent, in fact, on the work of a single scholar, René Dussaud,[31] both on his monograph, *Les découvertes de Ras Shamra, Ugarit, et l'Ancien Testament* (1937), and on three articles (published in the 1930s).[32] In *Patterns*, Eliade makes no reference to primary texts in translation; all of his data is from Dussaud.[33]

The number of translated texts and scholarly studies available to Eliade on Ugaritic material has vastly expanded in the remarkable bibliographic essays appended to each section of the *History*.[34] Dussaud is no longer cited on Ugarit, although his monograph on the Canaanite origins of Israelitic sacrifice (in its 1941 revised edition) is judged to be "still very useful,"[35] and Eliade has shifted from citing articles in generalist journals to those in specialized journals (e.g., *Syria*) and series (e.g., *Ugaritica; Ugarit-Forschungen*). Eliade is able to list twenty-one monographs, including seven collections of translated texts; nineteen articles; and one dissertation. In addition, he cites five articles dealing specifically with relations of Baal to YHWH. In striking contrast to *Patterns*, in the *History* he both evaluates and joins in scholarly controversies on the basis of more recent literature. While he records one item from 1939, the other forty works listed were published between 1949 and 1973 (the year the section was completed), the majority after 1960.

The bibliographic differences between *Patterns* and the *History* reflect the different intention of the two works. In *Patterns*, the relation of Baal to El is one comparative exemplum among more than a hundred in a chapter concerned

31. Given the question that has animated this essay, I delight in the fact that the only notice of Dussaud in Eliade's published journals reports, for November 17, 1950, that "yesterday evening I received a letter from René Dussaud and a check for two thousand francs. He says it is an advance payment for the second volume of *Patterns* (pour le deuxième tome du *Traité*)." Eliade worries that the money is a charitable ruse and is concerned with returning it without offending Dussaud. Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal [1945–1969]*, 135.

32. René Dussaud, *Les découvertes de Ras Shamra, Ugarit, et l'Ancien Testament* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1937); Eliade reviewed Dussaud's monograph, as part of a set of reviews of twelve books, in *Zalmoxis* 1 (1938): 226–49, *non vidi*. In *Patterns* (87–88, 113/90–91, 120), Eliade cites the second edition of Dussaud's work (Paris, 1941), along with three of articles by Dussaud: "La mythologie phénicienne d'après les tablettes de Ras Shamra," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* [hereafter *RHR*] 104 (1931): 353–408; "Le sanctuaire et les dieux phéniciennes de Ras Shamra," *RHR* 105 (1932): 245–302; and "Le vrai nom de Ba'al," *RHR* 113 (1936): 5–20. Note that all of Dussaud's articles that Eliade cites are from a generalist journal rather than from any number of European specialized journals. In *Patterns*, Eliade refers to no primary Ugaritic texts in translation, even though they were being made rapidly available in French specialized publications such as Charles Virolleaud's series, beginning with *Syria* in 1929.

33. Eliade had apparently met Dussaud and would have known of him as a Semitic specialist with wider comparative interests. Dussaud published both *Introduction à l'histoire des religions* (Paris, 1914), cited by Eliade in his "Bibliographical Suggestions" appended to chapter 1 of *Patterns* (42/34), in which Dussaud briefly discussed the Baal/YHWH conflict (pp. 165–66), and *Les Civilisations préhelléniques dans le bassin de la mer Egée: Études de protohistoire orientale* (2nd ed., Paris: P. Geuthner, 1914), a topic of considerable interest to Eliade.

34. Eliade, *History* 1:428–29, 430–31, 435–36/1:419–21, 422–23, 429.

35. Ibid., 1:436/1:429.

with a comparative elucidation of the structure of "Uranian deities" (sky gods) and the various morphological rules governing their transformations. In such a generalizing, comparative context, citing a single well-respected authority (Dussaud) is sufficient. In the *History*, by way of contrast, the materials on the relations of Baal to El form part of a survey of Ugaritic religion, itself part of a wider treatment of "Canaanite religion," found within a chapter titled "The Religions of the Hittites and Canaanites."[36] In this latter setting, for example, it is responsible to remind the reader in an italicized phrase that "the religion of Ugarit was never that of Canaan";[37] in *Patterns*, such a caution would be unnecessary. In the *History*, Baal and El are exemplary of one particular religious tradition; in *Patterns*, Baal and El are exemplary of a fundamental process in religion.

I have analyzed elsewhere,[38] and at some length, the overall structure and logic of Eliade's second chapter in *Patterns*, comprising sixty-eight pages in the original French edition and titled "Sky: Uranian Deities, Celestial Rites and Symbols," which contains his brief analysis of the relations of Baal to El, and need not repeat that here. In the context of *Patterns*, the Baal example is used to illustrate a moment in a series of morphological transformations: sky → sky personified → sky becoming otiose → fused deities (storm gods/fecundators). Among imperial religious traditions (those that Eliade names "historical peoples"), the last transformation results in fused deities who become increasingly involved with human affairs, while their sky gods are transformed into sovereign deities or assume attributes of the storm god/fecundator, by being transformed into bringers of rain, spouses of earth. In Eliade's understanding of the Ugaritic myths, El represents the transformation of an otiose deity into an active and fecundating deity, further transformed into a weakened god who becomes increasingly remote. As such, El is "supplanted" by a younger, more active storm god/fecundator deity, Baal. Viewed from this perspective, the Israelitic contestation between YHWH and Baal is a struggle between two analogous deities, who play the role of supplanters, for the single place available for such a figure within the Israelitic system. Because the morphological processes at work in the Canaanite and Israelitic systems are comparable and are themselves but local instances of these larger processes, Eliade is able either to simply mention Baal in a long list of "gods of the second class . . . fecundators and storm gods"[39] or to limit his description of the conflict between YHWH and Baal to a single sentence.[40]

36. Ibid., vol. 1, chap. 6, pars. 48–52, especially par. 48.
37. Ibid., 1:164/1:150.
38. Smith, *Relating Religion*, 87–91.
39. Eliade, *Patterns*, 82/83.
40. Ibid., 102/110.

In the *History*, the treatment of Baal in the Ugaritic materials is necessarily different than that in *Patterns*, owing both to the purpose of the work and to the multiple contextualizations of the data.[41] In the widest view, the context is the "Neolithic Revolution"—a term popularized by V. Gordon Childe[42]—characterized by Eliade as "The Longest Revolution: The Discovery of Agriculture—Mesolithic and Neolithic" (*History*, chapter heading, chapter 2) as exhibited in the early religions of Eurasian primary centers of urban genesis: Mesopotamia (chapter 3), Egypt (chapter 4), and Indus Valley (chapter 5)—unaccountably, a comparable treatment of China is postponed to the second volume of the *History* (chapter 16). The more immediate context for the treatment of Baal in the Ugaritic materials is that of the religions of Eurasian secondary sites of urban genesis, beginning with Anatolia and the Levant as exhibited in Hittite and Canaanite religions (treated together in chapter 6), followed by Israel (chapter 7 for the premonarchical period; chapter 14, for the monarchical), before returning to Indo-European traditions, beginning with Vedic India (chapter 8).

The Hittite sections of chapter 6 of the *History* (pars. 43–48) focus on "the myths that recount the conflicts between successive generations of the gods," joining in contemporary scholarly debate by comparing the Mesopotamian (Semitic) and Hittite (Indo-European) "Kingship in Heaven" mythologems.[43] Eliade then presents a generalized discussion of "The Canaanite Pantheon" (par. 48),[44] before taking up the Baal mythological "trilogy" in considerable detail (pars. 49–51), leading up to a concluding generalizing treatment of the "Canaanite Religious Vision" (par. 52). This latter is summarized, in a rather weak formulation, as the "belief in the sacredness of life," more usefully characterized as "a new religious creation which aims at integrating certain negative aspects of life into a unified system of antagonistic rhythms."[45] Eliade clearly intends these formulations to encompass and enlarge the older Frazerian characterizations of such traditions in terms of vegetative cycles. This discussion leads to a concluding paragraph on the "assimilations" of Canaanite religious "elements" in Israelitic traditions (a topic returned to in chapter 7).

Within the *History*, Eliade places the ultimate culture-historical setting of the Ugaritic Baal traditions within the context of an invasion model, a model

41. Recall that one of Eliade's pre-*History* understandings of the historical element in the history of religions was that of providing "examples" with "their historico-cultural contexts." See the references in note 22 above.

42. V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, rev. ed. (1936; reprint, New York: New American Library, 1951), 59–86.

43. Eliade, *History*, 1:161–62/1:148–49.

44. Given Eliade's caution, cited above (see note 37), the French title of par. 48, "Un panthéon canaanéen: Ugarit," might be better translated as "One Canaanite Pantheon: Ugarit."

45. Eliade, *History*, 1:172–74/1:159–60.

that has come to be assessed as increasingly problematic.[46] In his narrative, first, a set of invaders, conventionally called "Canaanites," "became sedentary" and began to "practice agriculture, and develop an urban civilization," a process that "*marks the first establishment of the Semites*."[47] Other immigrants followed. Some 800 years after the Canaanites, there was a second major "irruption"[48] in the region, the invasion of the "semi-nomadic" Amorites, as well as a "constant series of attacks by impetuous and 'savage' nomads." These were, in turn, aggravated by the late second-millennium "settlement" of the Israelites. This complex, layered history produced both a "tension" and a "symbiosis between the cults of agrarian fertility" of the settled folk and the "religious ideology of the nomadic pastoralists . . . dominated by celestial and astral divinities." This tension, in Eliade's construction, was "raised to the level of a paradigmatic model," yielding "a new type of religious experience" in "conflict with the old and venerable traditions of cosmic religiosity." Reflecting these historical (not morphological) transformations, the "interest of the Ugaritic documents lies above all in the fact that they illustrate the phases of the passage from one religious ideology to another."[49] Eliade appears to have in mind as well a more proximate context, implied but never explicitly stated, that of the development of the palace and temple-state economy and an early system of writing.

In the *History*, Eliade expands his discussion of the "supplanting" of El by Baal from a sentence along with a few clauses in *Patterns* to three, rather dense, consecutive paragraphs.[50] While Eliade argues at the outset that "a great part of Ugaritic mythology is devoted to the conflict between El and Baal," the fact that he does not cite any Ugaritic text in support of this claim, and that his careful treatment of the three major episodes in the reconstructed Baal myth(s) have antagonists other than El (pars. 49–51) calls Eliade's initial characterization into question. As he continues his exposition, he reworks some of his

46. Among the critics of the invasion model, pride of place is to be given to Colin Renfrew. See, especially, Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of European Origins* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Peter Bellwood and Colin Renfrew, *Examining the Language/Farming Dispersal Hypothesis* (Cambridge, UK: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2002).

I should note, as well, that Renfrew has proved increasingly suggestive with respect to the archaeology of the material remains of religion, a topic scanted in Eliade's *History* (see below, note 67). See, especially, Colin Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Cult* (London: British School of Archaeology at Athens, 1985); and, more recently, Renfrew, "The Archaeology of Religion," in *The Ancient Mind: Elements of Cognitive Archaeology*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Ezra B. W. Zubrov (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 47–54.

47. Eliade, *History*, 1:163/1:149, emphasis in original.

48. It is not clear on what basis Eliade uses the strong judgmental verb "ruined" when he writes that the Canaanite civilization "est ruinée par l'irruption d'une nouvelle population sémitique, les Amorites" (*History*, 1:163/1:151).

49. Ibid., 1:164/1:150.

50. Ibid., 1:164–66/1:150–52.

applications of those morphological processes that dominated his description in *Patterns*. While no longer placing the "conflict" within a comparative Uranic context where an increasingly otiose celestial deity is supplanted by a storm god/fecundator, Eliade formulates a revised context: that of a weakened creator-cosmocrator being replaced by a god "specialized" in cosmic fertility. To quote the central elements in this description:

> El is the head of the pantheon. . . . Yet despite the epithets that present him as a powerful god . . . El appears in the myths as physically weak, indecisive, senile, resigned. . . . We must conclude that the laudatory epithets [e.g., Powerful, Bull, King] reflect an earlier situation when El was in fact the head of the pantheon. The replacement of an older creator and cosmocrator god by a more dynamic young god, "specialized" in cosmic fertility, is a rather frequent phenomenon. Often the creator becomes a *deus otiosus* and withdraws farther and farther from his creation. . . . Insofar as it is possible to reconstruct the essential themes of Ugaritic mythology, we may say that the texts show us the advancement of Baal to the supreme rank.[51]

While this sort of account was a quite conventional understanding in the older scholarly literature, there is now a growing consensus that the texts do not bear this out. Eliade did cite, without comment, in both footnotes and the appended bibliography to his discussion of El/Baal,[52] the sustained reexamination of this reconstruction of their relations by Ulf Oldenburg, but he was able to maintain his interpretation by appealing to Frank M. Cross's influential work, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic,* which appeared just as Eliade completed his manuscript of the Ugaritic section of the *History*.[53] This fortuitous conjunction allowed Eliade to write, without giving details, "now see F. M. Cross. . . . (There is a critique of Oldenburg's thesis in n.51)."[54] Given the date of original publication of the first volume of the *History* (1976), or, for that matter, of its English translation (although copyrighted in 1978, it was published in October 1979), Eliade could not have incorporated C. L'Heureux's important dissertation, *Rank among the Canaanite Gods: El, Ba'al and the Repha'îm*

51. Ibid., 1:164–65/1:151–52.

52. Ibid., 1:165n25; 428, 429/1:151n25; 420, 421.

53. Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1969); Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

54. *History*, 1:428/1:420.

(1979),[55] which convincingly establishes that El is never superseded as the supreme deity, the king of the gods. Eliade's increasing infirmities and his death in 1986 precluded his awareness of the continued critical scholarship on the rankings and structure of the Canaanite pantheon. Scholars are coming to agree that, on the basis of both Ugaritic mythic texts and rituals, the prestige of El is undoubted in all the layers of the tradition, a conclusion sufficient "to discount attempts to make of him a *deus otiosus* in Ugaritic religion."[56]

## III

In *Patterns*, the treatment of the relations of Baal and YHWH within the Israelitic religious traditions serve Eliade as a privileged exemplum. They are first introduced as the subject of the longest descriptive passage in the initial methodological section of its first chapter, "Approximations: The Structure and Morphology of the Sacred." The issue Eliade addresses is that of the relations of morphology to history within the structure of the hierophany inasmuch as each hierophany is a "double revelation: 1. it reveals a modality of the sacred in that it is a hierophany; 2. it reveals, in that it is an historical occurrence, a situation of man in relation to the sacred." For these reasons, hierophanies can only be understood within the "framework of history," for "it is always in a particular historical situation that the sacred manifests itself."[57] The reader will recognize that each of these general statements is grounded in Eliade's foundational model for hierophanies, that of incarnation, which he expresses as the "paradox of incorporation," or, more frequently, as either the "paradox of the sacred" or the "dialectic of hierophanies."[58] Eliade's persistence in maintaining the particular situating of each hierophany raises, for him, the question of the localism of the hierophany "not destroying its ecumenicity."[59]

55. Conrad L'Heureux, *Rank among the Canaanite Gods: El, Ba'al and the Repha'îm* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 1–108. Among more recent scholarship, see especially, Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), cf. Handy, "Dissenting Deities or Obedient Angels: Divine Hierarchies in Ugarit and the Bible," *Biblical Research* 35 (1990): 99–126; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 54–66 et passim; see his earlier note, "Divine Travel as a Token of Divine Rank," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 16 (1984): 359.

56. Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 224.

57. Eliade, *Patterns*, 16/2.

58. Ibid., 36, 38, 394–95/26, 29–30, 461–63.

59. Ibid., 17/3. See, briefly, Smith, *Relating Religion*, 85–87. One of Eliade's most explicit statements, one that has often been criticized, is in *Patterns*, 36/26: "The paradoxical act of incorporation, which makes all of the species of hierophanies possible, from the most elementary to the supreme incarnation of the Logos in Jesus Christ, is to be found everywhere in the history of religions." Without blunting the critique (see, already, S. J. Reno, "Eliade's Progressional view of Hierophanies," *Religious Studies* 8 [1972]: 153–60), it must be noted that Sheed's English

In this opening chapter, after offering three brief examples of hierophanic "double revelation" with an interest in the dynamics of local/universal (the Israelitic prophets, Mahayana mystics, and the Indic sacred fig tree), Eliade turns to an extended "additional" example, that of

> a hierophany which was left behind by the very history of the people in which it took place—the Semites, at a particular moment in their history, had worshiped the divine pair, Ba'al, the god of storm and fecundity, and Bêlit, the goddess of fertility (especially of agriculture). The Jewish [*sic*] prophets considered these cults sacrilegious. From their point of view, that is to say, [speaking] from the point of view of Semites who . . . had accepted a more elevated, more pure, and more complete conception of divinity [because of the "Mosaic reform"]—this criticism was wholly justified. Nevertheless, the paleosemitic cult of Ba'al and Bêlit was . . . a hierophany, it revealed . . . the sacrality of organic life, the elemental forces of blood, sexuality, and fecundity. This revelation maintained its value for many centuries, if not for thousands of years . . . [until] it was replaced by another—brought to completion by the religious experience of an elite. . . . The "divine form" of YHWH prevailed over the "divine form" of Ba'al. . . . [The] Yahwist hierophany triumphed because it represented a universal modality of the sacred, and as such, because of its nature, was accessible to other cultures; it became, through Christianity, a world religious value.[60]

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translation (see above, note 19) characteristically alters Eliade's thought, or misses his use of technical vocabulary, when Eliade touches on Christian topics. For example, here, by failing to translate the phrase "all of the species" reading only, "this paradox of incarnation which makes hierophanies possible," Sheed misses that the series from "elemental" to "supreme" is a morphological series of increasing complexity and not an evaluation.

The most egregious alteration—in a quite parallel formulation on the same general topic—occurs in *Patterns*, 382/448. The passage reads, in revised translation, "However, in the wider sense of the word, anything can be a symbol or can play the role of a symbol, from the most rudimentary kratophany (which, in one way or another, 'symbolizes' the magico-religious power incorporated in whatever object) to Jesus Christ who, from a certain point of view, can perhaps be considered a symbol of the miracle of the incarnation of divinity in man." Sheed's English translation (p. 448) has piously added a clause entirely of her own making, perhaps, being charitable, in order to explain Eliade's phrase "from a certain point of view." Sheed adds, as indicated by brackets: "from the most rudimentary kratophany . . . to [Christ himself who (prescinding from the question of his own historical claims) can at least] be held to be a symbol." The use of parentheses does not excuse the interpolation.

While examples could be multiplied, I close this note with only one more, the interpolation of a new first sentence, which causes the creation of a new paragraph, neither of which has any warrant in Eliade's text, on the subject of the Tree of Life: "For those who see the Genesis story as simply one of many myths, constructed on the same general principle, certain questions arise" (*Patterns*, 288; cf. *Traité*, 230). Sheed's interpolation has the effect of shifting the addressee of Eliade's set of questions, which follow, from the biblical text (Genesis 3:22–23), as Eliade intended, to "those" who read the biblical text comparatively, a shift Sheed intended.

60. Eliade, *Patterns*, 17–18/3–4.

Although the mention of an "elite" might suggest to the reader that Eliade entertains the possibility of a sociopolitical analysis,[61] *Patterns*, as a morphological work, properly focuses instead on processes of transformation internal to religious "forms." This is even more explicit in the other extended descriptive passage in *Patterns* relating to the conflict of Baal and YHWH:

> In certain cases, without doubt due to the appearance of agriculture and agrarian religions, the celestial deity remains a presence as an atmospheric and storm god. But this "specialization," which confers a number of prestiges upon him, at the same time limits his "omnipotence." The storm god is "dynamic" and "strong"; he is the "bull," he is the "fecundator"; his myths enrich themselves, and his cults become dazzling—but he is no longer the "Creator" of the Universe nor of humanity; he is no longer omniscient; at times he is merely the partner of a Great Goddess. It is against this storm god, [the] Great Male, orgiastic, rich in dramatic epiphanies, who was addressed in a rich and bloody cult (sacrifices, orgies, etc.) that the religious revolutions [embodying] monotheistic, prophetic and messianic structures, took place in the Semitic world. It was in this struggle between Ba'al and YHWH or Allah that a new actualization of celestial values was opposed to terrestrial values (wealth, fertility, power); that qualitative criteria (the "interiorization" of faith, prayer, love) [were ranged] against quantitative criteria (concrete sacrifices, the supremacy of ritual acts, etc.). But the fact that "history" made inevitable the displacement of those epiphanies of the elemental forces of life does not necessarily imply that they have lost their religious value. . . . [T]hese archaic epiphanies represented, in their origin, a variety of means by which biological life was sanctified; they became "dead things" only to the degree that they lost their original function of showing the sacred, and became simple "phenomena," of economic and social necessities for [profane] life.[62]

Here, Eliade gives strong voice to his conviction that history cannot erase, but only suppress, religious value. Economic and social data can be employed only to interpret ossified hierophanies ("dead things," Eliade's translation of the category of the idol). To the degree that biological life must be "sanctified,"

61. When writing on Israelitic religion in *Patterns*, Eliade consistently associates the claim of a "Mosaic cultic reform" with the beliefs and actions of a "monotheistic elite" (e.g., *Patterns*, 201–3/229–32).

62. Ibid., 100/110.

religious "forms" such as Baal remain religious possibilities, if they themselves become transparent to the realities they point to, "show," or embody.

In other writings of the same period as *Patterns*, Eliade returns, in a variety of contexts, to the relations of Baal and YHWH. While space does not allow an exhaustive catalog and discussion, I call attention to a few passages. Given the discussion of the perspective of *Patterns* just concluded, it may seem surprising that Eliade, in at least three works, offers a brief economic interpretation of the alternation of Israelitic devotion to the cults of YHWH and Baal, repeating, with but slight verbal variation, the same sentence: "Each time that the ancient Hebrews experienced a period of peace and prosperity, they abandoned YHWH for the Ba'als and Astartes of their neighbors. Only historical catastrophes forced them to [re]turn to YHWH."[63] But this note concerning the varying attractions of religious "forms" phrased in terms of a human response does not interfere, in these same works, with Eliade's more extended morphological analysis in terms of a replacement of the remote celestial deity with more proximate forms as explaining both internal transformation and human attraction to these "forms."[64] Indeed, in what is his most developed discussion, he interprets the conflict in purely morphological terms.[65]

As already suggested, something more is at stake for Eliade in his description of the supersession of the celestial deity and its replacement by deities more active in terms of human affairs, one not entirely unrelated to the issue of the idolatrous just briefly discussed. What he suggested in his (then) private journals as the "secret" of *Patterns* comes to public voice in that curious and passionate midcareer volume *Myth and Reality* (1963). Here the replacement of the otiose, supreme, celestial deity is explicitly linked to Nietzsche's "death of God" and Buber's "eclipse of God," along with the Tillichian note that "genuine 'religions' appear after he [the Supreme Being, the Creator God] has vanished."[66] This is no longer a morphological-structural analysis but rather one that may be properly termed theological proclamation.

Let us briefly compare this treatment of the contestation of YHWH and Baal in Eliade's earlier writings to Eliade's treatment of the same topic in the *History*. If the latter work can be seen as a more self-consciously historicistic

63. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 126; Eliade, *Eternal Return*, 106; Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 93.

64. See, especially, Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 124–27.

65. Mircea Eliade, "Puissance et sacralité dans l'histoire des religions," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 21 (1953): 11–44. I cite the English translation in Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 123–54, esp. 136–37, 141–43.

66. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 95–97; the "conflict" of Baal and YHWH is further discussed on pp. 108–10. See, further, Eliade's reference in his journals to the "secret" of *Patterns* cited in note 25, above.

endeavor compared with the earlier morphologically based works, it is possible to assess what has been gained and what lost by this shift in perspective. For me, the results of Eliade's historicizing interpretations are far less interesting than those resulting from his accustomed morphological approach.

It should be stressed, at the outset, that the shift to a historical mode of interpretation entails, for Eliade, no fundamental shift in kinds of data. In interpreting the Baal/YHWH conflict, he remains dependent solely on literary texts: the Ugaritic myths, the Hebrew Bible. There is no use of material remains, artifacts, inscriptions, and other sorts of data prominent in studies that seek to elucidate the relations between Canaanite and Israelitic religions, broadly conceived. Thus his statements about the alternating attractions of Baal and YHWH arise only from scattered biblical statements (pejorative, with respect to Baal), found largely in the prophetic and Deuteronomic historical writings, not from demographic inferences out of archaeologically recovered data that have animated most recent discussions of the question.[67]

In the *History*, Eliade introduces his treatment of the Baal/YHWH conflict with a generalizing paragraph reflective of his historicistic concerns. The Israelites, "when they entered Canaan" (an "event" Eliade conventionally dates at 1200 b.c., without recognizing the scholarly conflicts over the "conquest of Canaan")[68] were "confronted" with Canaanite "cosmic sacrality," the belief in the sacredness of all life, which, as we have seen, is the baseline for Eliade's understanding of the religions of Canaan.[69]

> Since belief in the sacredness of life was also shared by the Israelites, a problem immediately rose: how would it be possible to preserve such a belief without accepting other elements of the Canaanite religious ideology, of which it was an integral part? This ideology implied . . . a particular theology centered on the intermittent and circular modality of the chief god, Baal, symbol of the totality of life.

67. Rather than a listing of specialized works, I refer the reader to Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), for a sustained investigation synthesizing textual and archaeological materials.

68. On the issue of the "conquest," see my comment in J. Z. Smith, "Religion Up and Down, Out and In," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 3–4: "It is a familiar chestnut that no matter how many white swans one observes they do not justify the utterance that all swans are white, but the observation of one black swan is sufficient to invalidate the utterance. . . . Within biblical archaeological/literary discourse, the non-event of the 'Conquest,' with its attendant negative implications for both the 'Exodus' and the so-called 'Settlement' of Canaan, has played the exemplary role of the black swan." The issue of "conquest" and "settlement" remains one of the most controversial ones, generating a massive literature. For a useful, selective bibliography and preliminary orientation to the issues (without endorsing either the approach or the conclusions), see W. G. Dever, "Archaeology and the Israelite 'Conquest,'" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:545–58.

69. Eliade, *History*, 1:172–74/1:159–60.

> Now, Yahweh did not share in this mode of being. . . . [However,] many Canaanite religious elements were assimilated by the Israelites.[70]

Eliade's quite literalistic understanding of chronological sequence in the *History* forces him to delay a discussion of "assimilation." Rather, despite his acknowledgment of the "late date of their redaction," and in accord with his enunciated principle that the date of the document is not the date of the religious conceptions it contains, Eliade begins his treatment of Israelitic religion "following the pre-modern tradition . . . with the first chapters of Genesis"![71] This enables him to take as his starting point a proclamation of the uniqueness of Israel's theology, a move that, in effect, precludes comparison,[72] by celebrating "a new . . . expression of the deity as absolutely different from his creation,

70. Ibid., 1:174/1:160–61. The odd phrase, referring to the "particular theology centered on the intermittent and circular modality [la modalité intermittente et circulaire] of the chief god Baal," is Eliade's 'translation' of the old theory of ancient Mediterranean 'dying and rising gods.' Compare the similar expression, "Yam though killed by Baal will reappear. . . . Nor is he [Yam] alone in enjoying a 'circular existence' [existence circulaire]" (*History*, 1:168/1:154). At times, Eliade's language for such deities uses quite conventional Frazerian terminology: "Baal . . . goes down to the underworld and perishes like Tammuz and the other vegetation gods. . . . El dreams that Baal is alive" (*History*, 1:171–72/1:157–58); at other times he criticizes the Frazerian model, substituting his own, Eliadean, formulations: "Certain authors claim to have seen in this myth a reflection of the annual death and reappearance of vegetation. . . . But the interest of the myth goes beyond its possible connections to the rhythm of vegetation. . . . [T]hese touching and sometimes spectacular events reveal to us a specific mode of divine existence, particularly a mode of being that includes defeat and 'death' . . . followed by more or less periodical 'reappearances.' . . . [This] is a new religious creation which aims at integrating certain negative aspects of life into a unified system of antagonistic rhythms" (*History*, 1:173/1:159). In addition to the three Ugaritic deities and Dumuzi/Tammuz, Eliade devotes a significant portion of his interpretation of Marduk to his nature as a "dying and rising deity" (*History*, 1:85–85, 170/1:85–86, 156). This category has generated a large literature, in more recent scholarship, a significant critical literature. In the discussions of the latter, the article by J. Z. Smith, "Dying and Rising Gods," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 4:421–27, is often taken to be the starting point of the new, critical reevaluation; see also the more extended treatment in J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), esp. 88–115. See, most recently, the comprehensive critical discussion of the Ugaritic materials (with excellent bibliographies) in Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2001), esp. 15–82, cf. Mettinger, "The 'Dying and Rising God': A Survey of Research from Frazer to the Present Day," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 63 (1998): 111–23; and Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. 104–31, 153–70, cf. Mark S. Smith, "The Death of 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Biblical World: An Update, with Special Reference to Baal in the Baal Cycle," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12 (1998): 257–313.

On the issue of Marduk, see the summary of research in J. Z. Smith, "A Pearl of Great Price and a Cargo of Yams: A Study in Situational Incongruity," *History of Religions* 16 (1976): 1–19, reprinted in Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 90–101, esp. 90–96. For the Assyrian polemic that serves as the fundamental text for the "dying and rising" interpretation of the Babylonian deity, Marduk, see, especially, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Tribulations of Marduk: The So-Called 'Marduk Ordeal Text,'" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 131–41.

71. Eliade, *History*, 1:176/1:163.

72. On the "unique" in relation to comparison, see my remarks in *Drudgery Divine*, 37–46, 52–53, and passim. See also the criticism of these in Gabriel Moran, *Uniqueness: Problem or Paradox in Jewish and Christian*

the 'utterly other' (the *ganz andere* of Rudolph Otto)," along with the parallel Israelitic "transformation of a cosmic type into events of sacred history";[73] "the religious genius of Israel transformed the relations of God with the chosen people into a 'sacred history' of a type previously unknown."[74] These innovations are part of the contents of the "revelation" to Moses and account for the dilemma of the Israelites as to what they ought to reject in Canaanite religious "ideology" as well as in much of Canaanite "cult," inasmuch as "Yahweh did not allow himself to be constrained by cult acts; he demanded the inner transformation of his worshippers through obedience and trust."[75]

Although, "in the beginning, Baal must have been accepted" by the Israelites, "as 'god of the land,' the supreme specialist in fecundity," "later [after the "Mosaic revelation"] . . . his cult was execrated and became the paradigmatic proof of apostasy."[76] The initial period of selective acceptance, assimilation, and rejection "continues until the seventh century B.C.,"[77] but the chronological literalism that organizes the *History* forces Eliade to defer an interpretation of the later pattern for six chapters, from chapter 6 to chapter 14, a hiatus of some 150 pages.

When Eliade resumes his discussion, it takes on more of the character of a paraphrastic description of biblical statements than an academic redescription.[78] The "institution of the monarchy"—which Eliade terms, in an italicized phrase, a "valorization of a foreign institution as a new act of sacred history"—resulted in a "syncretism [that] attained proportions thitherto unknown, for the monarchy encouraged the fusion of the religious ideas and practices shared by the two strata of the population, the Israelites and the Canaanites,"[79] although never going so far as to accommodate, at least in Judaea, the Canaanite "influence" regarding the propriety of divine images.

By way of contrast, and without inquiring into its logic, Eliade reports prophetic opposition to this royal policy of syncretism, beginning with Elijah's

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*Relations* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 5–6 and passim, which seem to me to fall wide of the mark. Moran argues that "the position I will develop in this work is that the word unique *always* invites comparison" (5, emphasis in original).

73. Eliade, *History*, 1:194, 191/1:182, 179, the latter italicized in both versions.

74. Ibid.., 1:184/1:171.

75. Ibid., 1:174/1:160. Note that, here, Eliade uncharacteristically reverts to an old understanding of ritual (one not innocent of Protestant apologetics vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism) as compulsion, that is to say, as "magic." The reversion is, perhaps, to be explained by Eliade here speaking in terms of the "prophetic" critique of cultic activity and not in his own voice—but explicit reflection on this sort of distinction in voices is lacking in the *History*, as well as in other works by Eliade.

76. Ibid., 1:197/1:184.

77. Ibid.

78. On the distinction between paraphrase and redescription, see Smith, *Relating Religion*, 29–31, 197–98, 208–9, et passim. Note that the last two page references are from an address to the Society of Biblical Literature.

79. Eliade, *History*, 1:349/1:335.

"revolt" against a "religious syncretism with the cult of Baal or Malkart, a cult protected by Queen Jezebel, a native of Tyre,"[80] and culminating in Jeremiah's attack on those who "burned incense to Baal."[81] Eliade's only general interpretation of this prophetic "revolt" occurs in a section that explicitly refers back to Eliade's curious association of Israelitic religion with modernity in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*,[82] in a section of the *History* entitled "Religious Valorization of the 'Terror of History.'"[83] Here, the "desacralization of nature, devalorization of cult activity, in short, the violent and total rejection of cosmic religiosity . . . were the response of the prophets to the historical crisis that threatened the very existence of the two Jewish [*sic*] kingdoms."[84] This conclusion, here, has been shorn of all morphological reference to the conflict of YHWH and Baal as representing a characteristic struggle for supremacy between two equivalent "replacement" deities, both superseding an increasing remote celestial deity, both functioning as "fused deities: storm gods and fecundators"—a pattern as characteristic of Australia and India as of the Levant. The "victory of Yahwism," as understood in the *History*, has been reduced (in the last quoted passage), in a manner not improper for a historical as opposed to a morphological investigation, to a matter of external influences: the imperialisms of Assyria and Babylonia. In my judgment, this reduction comes at an unacceptably high price.

## IV

What, then, can be said by way of a conclusion? The *History* is an impressive work in its magisterial command both of a wide variety of complex religious traditions and of the important scholarship on those religions. In the particular test case that was chosen, that of the Ugaritic understanding of Baal and the relations of Baal/YHWH in the Israelitic materials, although I have criticized aspects of Eliade's interpretation in the light of some newer directions in contemporary scholarship, he was by no means departing from what was, at the time of his writing, a broad consensus among scholars in a field in which he was, in his own words, a "non-specialist." (Indeed, many of these new directions first came to prominence in the years between the 1973 completion of the

80. Ibid., 1:356/1:342.

81. Ibid., 1:363/1:349.

82. See my discussion of this in J. Z. Smith, introduction to the Princeton University Press centennial edition of Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), xvii–xix.

83. Eliade, *History*, par. 121; 1:368–70/1:354–56.

84. Ibid., 1:369/1:355.

manuscript of the half chapter on the Ugaritic texts and the 1976 French publication of the first volume of the *History*). A work of such ambitious scope will, by its very nature, be filled with such moments that invite reconsideration; items that require correction and emendation but not, for the most part, rejection. In this regard, the *History* functions, and will continue to function, in a way analogous to an encyclopedia. In both its text and its bibliographies, the *History* provides a valuable starting point for further inquiries, one that is provocative of both thought and questions.

However, this is not the only judgment that is required. In light of what I have detailed in this essay, I would modify my appraisal that was the object of Ricketts's critique, that the "companion volume" promised in *Patterns* "cannot be identified with . . . the *History*,"[85] but I would not withdraw it. Upon rereading the work, it became clear that it stands in closer relation to *Patterns* than I had initially recognized, and this, from my perspective, is one of its strengths. This said, it still does *not* appear to me to fulfill the agendum of the promised "companion volume." While it provides minimal historical contextualization, it fails to reflect explicitly on the relations between the morphological approach, as exemplified in *Patterns*, and a historical approach, as illustrated by the *History*. In part, this is due to the inadequate conceptualization of the historical embodied in the work. Eliade, in the *History*, persistently reduces the historical to matters of location in time and place. While it is eager to spot intercultural exchange (an element that gives the *History* considerable value), it fails to offer complex explanations, as well as to engage in historical interrogations of its sources, that would illuminate them; moreover, it lacks other features that would characterize a more adequate understanding of both historical processes and historiographical procedures. In short, questions of historical theory and method, equivalent in depth to those raised elsewhere in Eliade's oeuvre with respect to morphology, are absent. While a welcome shift to an anthropological perspective occurs, the shift is neither theorized nor, in any other way, accounted for—most particularly in relation to the onto-theological concerns of *Patterns*. (In this regard, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* is more explicit as to this shift, while remaining theoretically underdeveloped.) The lack of the concluding volume to the *History*, Eliade's growing problems with his health, and, finally, his death preclude asking whether this final volume might have contained some sort of a postscript (in lieu of an introduction) that dealt, at some length, with such matters. I would like to think so. As it stands, in its truncated form, the *History*, as a fulfillment of all that might be predicated of a "companion volume" to *Patterns*, must remain, at best, a matter sub judice.

85. Smith, *Relating Religion*, 73. See note 6, above.

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# PART III

# Mircea Eliade

*Politics and Literature*

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# 11

# Southeast Europe and the Idea of the History of Religions in Mircea Eliade

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*Translated from the French by Nicolas Meylan*

In his rich work entitled *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade,*[1] Douglas Allen raises the issue of the origins of Mircea Eliade's conception of religions in general and of Christianity in particular in the following terms: "The question is whether Eliade universalizes—as his essential model for all religion—an archaic ontology and certain kinds of Eastern spirituality that devalue the temporal and the historical. Does Eliade provide an interpretation of Christianity that favours archaic, cosmic, Hindu and other Eastern, nonhistorical religious roots, influences, and structures?"[2] Allen's question leads me to the problem I would like to discuss here: How is Eliade's understanding of the history of religions rooted in the conception of southeast Europe he developed in the 1930s and 1940s?

Looking at the geography of the cultural and religious universes present in Mircea Eliade's work, it seems to me that only two regions play a truly generative role in the development of his intellectual leanings and of his thinking as a historian of religions: India and the Balkans. He repeatedly stressed not only the importance of one or the other region in the birth of various themes in his thinking but also those factors that, to his mind, brought them together as early as the

1. Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (New York: Garland, 1998).
2. Ibid., 118.

beginning of the 1930s.[3] The theme of a pre-Aryan, pre-Islamic, or pre-Christian substratum upon which today's great religions of India, central Asia, or Europe rest, as well as the theme of a "cosmic religion" or that of a Eurasian Neolithic unity, clearly issue from Eliade's Indian experience. On the other hand, the problem of the relationship between "mythical time" and "historical time," of the "terror of history" and of "cosmic Christianity," all bear the stamp of Eliade's ideas about the roots of Romanian and more generally Balkan identity. To be sure, the importance of his sojourn in India, endlessly mentioned by Eliade, is attested, among other things, by the fact that it was for him the point of departure for a reinterpretation of Romanian and Balkan identity, which was to have important consequences, both intellectually and politically. It is very likely that Eliade would not have valorized prehistory, protohistory, and Balkan folklore from the perspective of the history of religions had he not "discovered" an idealized pre-Aryan India whose remains he believed he could identify in the daily religious experience of ordinary Indian people.[4] In his diary entry for June 1, 1960, he writes: "I think I can be counted among the few Europeans who have been able to revalorize 'Nature,' by discovering the dialectics of hierophanies and the structure of cosmic religiosity. . . . I identified cosmic sacralities by reflecting on the daily experience of Romanian or Bengali peasants. My starting point therefore was contemporary historical situations and living cultural values."[5]

But besides the life of Bengali and Romanian agricultural communities that Eliade explicitly mentioned, there is another, this time unmentioned, "contemporary historical situation," an intermediary term in the relationship between India and Romania, or India and southeast Europe, as he envisioned it in the 1930s. This "situation" is the tumultuous debate that his country's intellectuals began in the period between the two world wars, about Romanian identity or "specificity." Before leaving for India, Eliade had not taken part in this debate, which raged mostly in the second half of the 1920s and centered around the relationship between Orthodoxy and national identity, between Christianity and peasant religiosity, between the Orthodox East on the one

3. Mircea Eliade, *L'épreuve du labyrinthe: Entretiens avec Claude-Henri Rocquet* (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1978), 69–75; Eliade, *Les promesses de l'équinoxe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 285–88.

4. In Douglas Allen's words, "What seems clear is that his experiences of mythic and religious phenomena in India were significant in influencing his many writings in Romania, especially in the late 1930s, on Romanian spirituality and, more generally, on myth and symbols of archaic and traditional cosmic spirituality"; Allen, *Myth and Religion*, 117–18.

5. Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), vol. 1, 334: "Je pense pouvoir me compter parmi les rares européens qui ont réussi à revaloriser la 'Nature,' en découvrant la dialectique des hiérophanies et la structure de la religiosité cosmique. . . . Je suis arrivé aux sacralités cosmiques à force de réfléchir à l'expérience de tous les jours des paysans roumains ou bengalis. Je suis donc parti de situations historiques contemporaines et de valeurs culturelles vivants."

hand and the—catholic or rationalist—West on the other.[6] Though he stayed outside such discussions before 1929, Eliade was in no way unaware of them, and it was actually in India that he came to find them meaningful and important. A letter sent from Calcutta to the historian of religions and Orphism specialist Vittorio Macchioro, written in English and dated March 15, 1931, suggests that Eliade's stay in India functioned as a catalyst for the debate on Romanian identity. The importance of this letter, first published in 2004, should not be underestimated. First of all, it confirms what Eliade himself wrote in his memoirs or what he affirmed in later conversations concerning the importance of the Indian experience for his future vision of religious folklore and pre-Christian survivals in the Balkans. Furthermore, we have here a witness of the first use of the syntagm "cosmic Christianity" as well as the context in which it appeared. This was a syntagm that Eliade was to use until his last book (*A History of Religious Ideas*) and that, like the phrases "terror of history," *illud tempus*, "hierophany," and *axis mundi*, is distinctive of his work as a historian of religions.

In this letter, Eliade confesses to Macchioro that he has managed to understand the meaning of what the poet Lucian Blaga called, in a famous article written in 1921, the "revolt of the non-Latin substratum" of the Romanian people[7]—a phrase that in its days had not escaped notice in Romania. This was a "revolt," as Eliade explains in his letter, "which, in the last ten years, has changed the entire aspect of Romanian culture, art and religious life." Blaga's article—which Eliade does not cite, merely using the surprising expression from Blaga's title—was indeed one of the first texts to engage in the identity debate of the 1920s.

"You know," writes Eliade to Macchioro,

> that we, the Rumanians, we have taken from Rome only the institutions and the language. Our spiritual substance is alien, partly Thracian, partly Slavonic. We have always thought that we are the grand sons of Rome. But this it was only a political defense against our millenarian rulers (the Turks, Hungarians, etc.). When, after the grand war, we fulfilled our national unity, we realised the mistake. We saw how different our view of life and spirit is from the Latin one. First of all, we are naturally inclined to a "cosmic Christianity," so to speak. We feel that everything in this world is charmed with the love

6. Florin Țurcanu, *Mircea Eliade: Le prisonnier de l'histoire* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2003), 68, 78–93.

7. Lucian Blaga, "Revolta fondului nostru nelatin" [The Revolt of Our Non-Latin Substratum] *Gândirea*, September 1921.

> for our Lord, that the doves can be baptized and the trees are our brothers. We have some lovely popular songs about the fraternity between the man (the "Rumanian") and the hills, the forests, the beasts—and this brotherhood is made not by ourselves, but by the grace of our Lord. . . . In Rumanian, the word "Christian" is identical with the word "man." A Rumanian peasant thinks that his only duty is to be "right" and "good" . . . and being so, he is a Christian. For him, Christianity it is not a dogma, an exterior organism of rules and threats—but the basis of creation, the only sense of this earthly life. . . . I can see a meaning in all of this. That is what I call "cosmic" Christianity, as opposed to the ecclesiastical one.[8]

"Between 1932 and 1940, most of what I did in Romania originated in reflections or intuitions that arose in the spring or summer of 1931,"[9] Eliade wrote in his memoirs. The syntagm "cosmic Christianity" appeared in his writings in the spring of 1931 in the same Indian context in which he resolutely situated his discovery of "cosmic religiosity." It arose as a response to the question of Romanian identity that had been formulated in the 1920s, or as the synthetic expression of an authenticity derived from collective existence. "Cosmic Christianity" was first and foremost "Romanian Christianity," which, as Eliade would write one year later, "implies neither morality nor mysticism, but a soul in communion with Nature."[10] It appeared initially as a version of cosmic religiosity that was first Romanian and only later southeast European.

Douglas Allen's question, with which I opened this essay, receives new meaning when one considers the place—both in Eliade's work and in his life—held by the distinctive tension between the particular, one might say the "provincial," on the one hand and the universal on the other. This tension between particular and universal informs his diary entry for April 25, 1967: "In the history of religions, as in anthropology or folkloristics, comparison has the function of introducing the universal into a 'local,' 'provincial' study. This can be compared with local or national histories as they are integrated into Universal History, which ultimately reveals their true meaning."[11] The tension between the "provincial" and the universal, he went on to say toward the end of his life,

8. Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America. . . . Corespondență*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004), 170–71.

9. Eliade, *Les promesses de l'équinoxe*, 288: "Entre 1932 et 1940, la majeure partie de ce que je fis en Roumanie eut pour origine des réflexions, ou des intuitions, qui dataient du printemps et de l'été 1931."

10. Mircea Eliade, "Românul şi eroii neamului" ["The Romanian and the National Heroes"], *Cuvântul* (August 17, 1932).

11. Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal*, vol. 1, 53: "Dans l'Histoire des Religions, comme dans l'anthropologie et le folklore, la comparaison a pour fonction d'introduire l'élément universel dans une recherche 'locale,' 'provinciale.' A comparer avec l'histoire locale ou nationale intégrée dans l'Histoire Universelle, qui, finalement, en révèle le vrai sens."

can be identified in the totality of Romanian culture, that of the peasants as much as that of the elite.[12] I believe this was a way for Eliade to project what he always regarded as his own situation. Himself the product of a national culture that had reached its zenith between the wars, Eliade remained until the end—as his mature work *Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God*[13] shows—the bearer of questions, of doubts, perhaps even of different possible identities that from the start had characterized this culture's relationship with a Europe it had really joined only in the nineteenth century. The answers given to such questions and doubts had emphasized the Romanity of the Romanian people, their resistance, on Christendom's boundaries, to the Ottoman expansion in Europe, or their participation in the "Byzantine Commonwealth" and in a common Byzantino-Balkan civilization. Indeed, these answers mark the evolution of Romanian historiography from the end of the eighteenth century to the eve of the Second World War.

In the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, Mircea Eliade formulated in a unique way the dead end into which the different answers given by national historiography were headed. A new representation of southeast Europe and a reflection on the sources of the discipline of the history of religions and on the specific temporalities that it studied were to form the starting points from which to attempt to give a novel and at the same time more convincing and exalting answer to the question of Romanian identity.

Southeast Europe constitutes a reference that Romanian historiography—as well as linguistics and folkloristics—was able to introduce into the national cultural sphere at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Institute of South-Eastern European studies was created in Bucharest in 1914 at the initiative of Nicolae Iorga, and a second institute, called the Balkan Institute, was founded on the eve of the Second World War. The question of "Oriental" or "Balkan Romanity," the problem of the Byzantine matrix and South Slavic influences during the Romanian Middle Ages, and the problem of "Turkocracy" as it operated in the Balkans widened the horizon of national historiography by allowing it to transfer its questions and its intellectual and ideological ambitions to southeast Europe, an area that went beyond the latest boundaries of the nation-state.

In making use of the term "South-east Europe," Eliade was therefore appropriating an evocative syntagm that was then already current in the Romanian intellectual world, and which moreover bore the prestigious stamp of Nicolae Iorga—Romanian historiography's leader and "Apostle of the Nation."

12. Eliade, L'épreuve du labyrinthe, 111–112.

13. Mircea Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan: Etudes comparatives sur les religions et le folklore de la Dacie et de l'Europe Orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1970).

The positive reference to the Balkan sphere and its unambiguous classification in the Oriental domain appear in Eliade's work as early as 1933, when he evokes in an article "this Balkan peninsula whose unity is first glimpsed today"[14]—an allusion to Iorga's classical study *Le caractère commun des institutions du Sud-est européen*,[15] published four years earlier. In the context of the development of Eliade's theoretical thinking and technical vocabulary,[16] the number of references to southeast European unity or to Romania's membership in this geographic area increases sharply between the publications of his first *Yoga* in 1936 and the *Commentaries on the Legend of Master Manole* in 1943.[17]

During this period, Mircea Eliade's thinking moves along three major intersecting axes: (1) a stark equivalence between religious thought on the one hand and symbolic and mythical thought on the other, which leads to a positive evaluation of prehistory and protohistory as the age during which mythic and symbolic representations arise. The semantic value of the terms "myth" and "symbol" is stabilized, and as early as 1936 Eliade announces, in an interview, the forthcoming publication of a book, *Myth and Symbol*, which he would never write, but whose title clearly suggests the direction taken by his thinking from that point on; (2) an intense preoccupation with Romanian, and more generally Balkan, folklore in an attempt to turn it into a new point of entry for what he calls "religious studies" or the "history of religions"; and (3) an attempt to see the Romanian and southeastern European spheres as integral parts of the Oriental domain and its spiritual legacy construed as opposed to the Occidental world.

These three features of Eliade's thinking of that period are closely linked to the crystallization of his antihistoricism. This stance, which would become the main distinguishing feature of *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, first appears in his indictment of historicism and modern historiography at the end of the 1930s. Eliade's antihistoricism grows only in part out of the fact that the young scholar that he was in 1937 already proved, as his Chicago colleague Charles Long wrote, "unwilling to accept the imperialism of the historicistic and rationalistic modes of interpretations as the only valid approaches to the real."[18] Undoubtedly, the much discussed influence of the "penseurs de la Tradition"[19]

14. Mircea Eliade, "Să învățăm turcește!" ["Let's Learn Turkish!"], *Cuvântul*, August 28, 1933.

15. Nicolae Iorga, *Le caractère commun des institutions du Sud-est européen* (Paris: Universitaire J. Gamber, 1929).

16. Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots 1907–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 800ff.

17. Mircea Eliade, *Comentarii la legenda Meşterului Manole* (Bucharest: Publicom, 1943).

18. Charles Long, "The Significance for Modern Man of Mircea Eliade's Work," in *Cosmic Piety, Modern Man and the Meaning of Universe*, ed. C. Derrick (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1967), 136.

19. I only mention here the studies published by E. Montanari, "Eliade e Guénon," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 61 (1995): 131–49; Paola Pisi, "I 'Tradizionalisti' e la formazione del pensiero di Eliade," in

such as Julius Evola, Guénon, and most of all Coomaraswamy was at its zenith in the second half of the 1930s and played an important role in the crystallization of his antihistoricism. Another, less debated source of influence was the Romanian Lucian Blaga, whose philosophy of culture—inspired by Spengler and Leo Frobenius—had reached its full-fledged form by the middle of the 1930s[20] and was hailed by Eliade as the expression of its author's "metaphysical courage."[21] Through a historical conception of Romanian culture's genesis and its "stylistic unity," Blaga was contributing his own solution to the dead end to which the question of Romanian identity had been brought by historiography. With his philosophy, Eliade admiringly wrote in early 1938, Blaga "extracts culture from the series of historical facts and endows it with metaphysical validity."[22]

Eliade's antihistoricism owes much to all these authors, but it was also a reaction to a frustrating admission of cultural failure: the incapacity of the historiography of Romania—and more generally of other southeast European peoples—to provide Romanians and other southeastern Europeans a place in universal history. The recognition of this failure can be seen in his article "Protohistory or Middle Ages" (1937),[23] and it is no accident that it goes together, in Eliade's writings, with a new representation of southeast Europe. "We know that modern European culture is almost exclusively the creation of those nations that have had a glorious medieval history,"[24] notes Eliade in that text. He goes on to add that it is not surprising that modern man's historical consciousness and nineteenth-century historicism are the creations of these same nations. In choosing in the nineteenth century to give themselves a historical memory, Balkan societies had been forced to observe that ever since the Middle Ages they had been living on the threshold of a minor history: "The individualism,

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*Confronto con Mircea Eliade: Archetipi mitici e identita storica*, ed. Luciano Arcella, Paola Pisi, and Roberto Scagno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998); Daniel Dubuisson, "La conception elidadienne du symbolisme," *Gradhiva* 26 (1999): 25–36; Cristiano Grotanelli, "Mircea Eliade, Carl Schmitt, René Guénon, 1942," in *Interrompere il quotidiano: La costruzione del tempo nell'esperienza religiosa*, ed. Natale Spineto (Milan: Editorial Jaca, 2005); as well as the chapter "Eliade e il 'pensiero tradizionale'" in Natale Spineto's recent book, *Mircea Eliade, storico delle religioni* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2006).

20. Lucian Blaga, *Orizont şi stil* [Horizon and Style] (Bucharest: Fundaţia pentru literatură şi artă "Regele Carol II," 1935); Blaga, *Spaţiul mioritic* [The 'Mioritic' Space"—untranslatable. The title alludes to an emblematic ballad of the Romanian folklore "Mioriţa"] (Bucharest: Fundaţia pentru literatură şi artă "Regele Carol II," 1936); "Geneza metaforei şi sensul culturii" [The Genesis of the Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture], (Bucharest: Fundaţia pentru literatură şi artă "Regele Carol II," 1937).

21. Mircea Eliade, "Lucian Blaga şi sensul culturii" [Lucian Blaga and the Meaning of Culture], *Revista Fundaţiilor Regale*, January 1938, 162–66.

22. Ibid., 166.

23. Mircea Eliade, "Protoistorie sau Ev Mediu," *Vremea*, October 17, 1937. A French translation of this text is available [Protohistoire ou Moyen Age] in Mircea Eliade, *Fragmentarium* (Paris: L'Herne, 1989), 46–53.

24. "On sait que la culture européenne moderne est la création presque exclusive des nations qui ont eu un Moyen Âge glorieux." Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, 46.

the positivism, the asymbolism that naturally flowed out of the century of historicism were hard-pressed to find anything much in the past of the nations who had no glorious medieval history, which is to say no important figures, not enough events, not enough written documents, and no social and economical transformations important enough to provide brilliant foundations for a theory."[25] Eliade remarked that the specifically modern phenomenon of the development of Balkan national historiographies had not improved those nations' positions in European historical consciousness. "Around 1900," he specified without a trace of irony, "people showed a more sustained and sincere curiosity about any African and Australian tribe at all (obviously because of their ethnographic and sociological relevance) than about the history of Romania, of Bulgaria or Serbia."[26]

Eliade's dissatisfaction with the sources and the results of historical knowledge in the Balkans echoes the very real problem, particularly for Romanian historiography, of the paucity of usable sources for the formative period of the great migrations that ended with the Mongol invasion of 1241. The title that Eliade gave to his collection of studies on "the folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe," *De Zalmoxis à Gengis Khan* (*Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God*), published in 1970, shows the limits, both chronological and symbolic, of a history deprived of endogenous written sources, in other words, of a sort of prolonged prehistory that does not come to an end—at the mouth of the Danube—until, in the West, Saint Louis sits on the throne and Saint Thomas Aquinas begins his studies.[27] Since the eighteenth century, each generation of Romanian historians had bequeathed to the following one this quasi-insoluble problem of the "silence of the sources" that had been putting the national ego to shame in the Europe of aggressive nationalisms and that some less scrupulous historians had attempted to solve, in the Romantic period, by constructing false documents.

In 1937, Eliade was not satisfied with saying—as Lucian Blaga did—that the period of the great migrations coincided with a "withdrawal" from history, with a "boycott of history" by the Romanian people.[28] If "Romania did not have

25. "L'individualisme, le positivisme, l'asymbolisme qui découlaient naturellement du siècle de l'historisme n'avaient pas grand-chose à trouver dans le passé des nations sans Moyen Âge glorieux, c'est-à-dire sans grande personnalités, sans assez d'événements, sans assez de documents écrits, sans transformations sociales et économiques assez importantes pour offrir des fondements brillants à une théorie." Ibid., 47–48.

26. "Une curiosité plus soutenue et plus sincère à l'égard de n'importe quelle tribu africaine ou australienne (évidemment, pour leur valeur ethnographique et sociologique) qu'envers l'histoire de la Roumanie, de la Bulgarie ou de la Serbie." Ibid., 47.

27. "Rien de plus passionnant, ni de plus stimulant, pour la conscience occidentale que l'effort pour comprendre les créations de tant de 'préhistoires' et de 'protohistoires' (voire d''histoires provinciales' qui ont gravité en marge des Empires et ont survécu à leur chute), créations accumulées et conservées depuis des millénaires dans les cultures exotiques, primitives et 'folkloriques,'" writes Eliade in the preface of *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 12.

28. Lucian Blaga, *Spațiul mioritic*, in *Opere* [*Works*], vol. 9 (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1985), 301–2.

a glorious medieval history . . . it had a prehistory equal if not superior to that of the great nations of Europe,"[29] he writes in *Protohistory or Middle Ages*. The alternative was to emphasize, in Romania and in all of southeast Europe, the prehistoric and protohistoric cultural legacy preserved in this region as nowhere else in Europe. In such a perspective, the role played by the national historiographies should then be given to other disciplines: "Our troubling concern for 'history' must be rectified by an urgent development of studies of anthropogeography, pre-history, proto-history and folklore. Studies of Balkanology must be extended to their farthest limit—the prehistory of the peninsula."[30]

Eliade wrote *Protohistory or Middle Ages* to capture, as much culturally as politically, an epoch that was coming to an end. Elsewhere he remarked that the twentieth century "put an end to the primacy of history."[31] "History has dominated Romanian culture since its beginning,"[32] but "it is not 'the history' of Romania that will interest Europe."[33] He proposed—almost explicitly—to abandon the historiographical model understood as an instrument of exploring and defining an identity, especially since, in the European cultural landscape, "many signs seem to indicate that historicism as well as individualism and positivism are becoming completely obsolete."[34] Furthermore, interest in prehistory and protohistory is gaining momentum in "certain countries"—a transparent allusion to Germany and its Nazification of studies in the fields of the history of religions, folklore, and archaeology, oriented toward the exaltation of "Indo-Germanic" protohistory. "If the new disciplines are definitively established in European culture, the value of those nations that have a proto-history will be recognized, not of those that have a medieval history."[35] Prehistory, protohistory,

29. "Sia Roumanie n'a pas eu un Moyen Age glorieux . . . elle a eu une préhistoire égale si ce n'est supérieure à celle des grandes nations d'Europe." Eliade, *Protohistory or Middle Ages*, 50.

30. "Notre intérêt inquiétant pour 'l'histoire' doit être corrigé par un développement urgent des études d'anthropo-géographie, de préhistoire, de protohistoire et de folklore. Les études de balkanologie doivent être portées jusqu'à leur extrême limite—la préhistoire de la péninsule." Ibid., 53. This text could be usefully compared to a later one: "Les recherches systématiques dans le domaine de la palethnologie roumaine et balkanique sont encore à faire; il est pourtant déjà acquis qu'un certain nombre d'éléments culturels pré-indo-européens et paléo-indo-européens s'y sont mieux conservés que partout ailleurs en Europe (à l'exception, peut-être, de l'Irlande et des Pyrénées)." Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 184.

31. Mircea Eliade, "Secolul istoriei" [Le siècle de l'histoire] in *Fragmentarium* (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 1939), 102. French translation in Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, 144: "[Le 20e siècle] met fin à la primauté de l'histoire."

32. Mircea Eliade, "Speologie, istorie, folclor" [Spéléologie, histoire, folklore . . . ], *Cuvântul*, February 3, 1938. French translation in Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, 77: "L'histoire a dominé la culture roumaine depuis ses débuts."

33. "Ce n'est pas 'l'histoire' de la Roumanie qui intéressera l'Europe." Eliade, "Protohistoire ou Moyen Âge," in *Fragmentarium*, 51.

34. "De nombreux signes semblent indiquer un dépassement total aussi bien de l'historisme que de l'individualisme et du positivisme." Ibid., 48.

35. "Si les nouvelles disciplines s'instaurent définitivement dans la culture européenne, la valeur sera reconnue aux nations qui ont une protohistoire et non à celles qui ont un Moyen Âge." Ibid., 50.

and the folkloric heritage together make up the Balkans' entry card into a new universal history, different than the one from which the region had been excluded by historicism.

The reference to the Middle Ages—the promised land of national historiographies—also shows the influence of "traditionalist" thinkers, in particular that of Coomaraswamy. It is possible to say that Eliade calls for—and here I quote Jacques Le Goff's famous phrase—"a different Middle Ages," which would no longer be that of the historians. In his view, it was Guénon, Evola, and Ananda Coomaraswamy who, through the unveiling of the "unity of metaphysical traditions" and the transhistorical "universality" of symbolic languages, had rediscovered the Western Middle Ages by linking them to other epochs and other cultural areas, thereby withdrawing them from the restrictive representations imposed by historicism.[36]

The "new Middle Ages" of Guénon and Coomaraswamy came from the discovery of the intercultural range of symbolic languages, from a "quest for the meaning" of myths, symbols, and rituals rather than historical reconstitutions and distinctions. For Eliade, this implied a radical reversal of the place given to events, documents, and historical memory in the previous century and a half in Europe. "How false is our vision of a history validated exclusively by documents!"[37] he exclaimed in his journal on November 17, 1942. Indeed "universal history cannot be written on the basis of written documents—but only on the basis of spiritual documents, i.e. on the basis of myths and beliefs. Europe, in particular Western Europe, must be compared to the East and to the Nomads' steppes not through its written documents but through its myths."[38] He adds that "Romanian history, for example, should be compared to Western history through its myths: [the ballad] *Miorița* ["The Prophetic She-Lamb"], [the legend of] Master Manole, the heroic ballads."[39] These words recall those of Lucian Blaga, who in 1936 had written in a text Eliade knew well:

> Our tradition, merging with our stylistic matrix, is not of a temporal nature, nor heraldic or historical. In the West, "tradition" is built out of a pedantically reconstructed past, out of ancestors' galleries, and chronicles of great deeds. . . . There, tradition is historical, museum-like, it is a retrospective accounting. . . . Our own tradition is of a

36. Mircea Eliade, "Valorificări ale Evului Mediu" [Uses of the Middle Ages], *Vremea,* December 12, 1937. French translation [Points de vue sur le Moyen Age] in Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, 58–64; see also "Ananda Coomaraswamy," *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, July 1937, 183–89.

37. Mircea Eliade, *Jurnalul portughez și alte scrieri* [The Portuguese Diary and Other Writings], vol. 1 (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 153–54.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

> less visible nature, it can only be expressed metaphorically or metaphysically . . . it merges with the creative potentialities of style.[40]

The reversal of the status of "classical" historical documents, which—in Eliade's view—springs from this situation, translates into a febrile quest for alternative sources, which modern historiography looked upon with contempt or ignored but which, according to him, endow the history of religions with its distinctive operative capacity. The long article "Folkore as a Means of Knowledge" (1937) attests this point.[41] But one can see that the question of the limits of the "storage" of historical documents kept preoccupying him, a preoccupation linked, for example, in *Myth and Reality* (1963), to the mainly Balkan problem of gaining access to the pre-Christian religious legacy through "cosmic Christianity."[42] In the Balkans, the universe of mythologies, of pre-Christian religious symbols (which include "a whole *living*, popular section of Greek religion"), escapes our knowledge because it was not described "in a systematic manner, in writing."[43] Rural Christianity "endowed with a cosmic dimension," typical of this region, would then remain the sole possible entry point to this religious stratum in the absence of written records and thus in the absence of history.[44] The study of southeast Europe and of "cosmic Christianity" thus gives shape to one of the vocations of the history of religions—to be the "history of those peoples that are without history," that is, without writing.

Besides the lament provoked by this unjust and denaturalizing primacy of written documents, Eliade expresses the idea of the superiority of the oral over the written—undoubtedly fostered by his Indian experience and in particular by the importance of the oral transmission of esoteric knowledge within Tantrism. This could only further strengthen his valorization of folklore at the expense of written documents. This idea can be found in his writings until late in his life when, in 1979, he writes to a Romanian friend that we are "condemned to decipher the 'mysteries' and to 'discover the road to redemption' through culture, that is through books (and not through oral traditions transmitted from master to disciple)."[45]

One can see, at least since 1933, the sketched opposition between "historical individuality" and what he called "the presence of the fantastic, which, in all

40. Blaga, *Spațiul mioritic*, in *Opere* [*Works*], vol. 9, 295.

41. Mircea Eliade, "Folclorul ca instrument de cunoaştere," *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, April 1937. French translation [Le folklore comme moyen de connaissance] in *Cahiers de l'Herne: Mircea Eliade*, no. 33 (1978).

42. Mircea Eliade, *Aspects du mythe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 195–99.

43. Ibid., 196.

44. Ibid., 198–99.

45. Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America . . . Corespondență*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 112 and passim.

that the people create, abolishes history, abolishes personality."[46] Around 1940, it was all the more legitimate, in his view, to oppose Romanian folkloric productions to Western medieval chronicles because René Guénon and Coomaraswamy had spoken of folklore as a vehicle of "metaphysical content" and as a "degradation" of "traditional" esoteric knowledge.[47] This conception, which had a notable influence on Eliade's thinking, allowed him to autonomize folklore as the intermediate level between the "level of pure principles (symbol, metaphysics, and magic, which are the source of anything that the people create) and immediate, historical reality (events and individuals who are occasionally preserved in popular memory and projected into mythic categories)."[48] Folklore—as Eliade liked to repeat above all in the period between 1937 and the publication of the *Commentaries on the Legend of Master Manole* in 1943—is the guardian of "popular memory" (this syntagm is taken up in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*)[49] whose existence only proves the limits of historical memory: "Popular memory," he writes in 1938, "preserves primitive mental forms that history does not, precisely because they could not be expressed in durable media (documents, monuments, texts, etc.)."[50] And what other European region is richer in folkloric legacies, and thus in popular memory, than the Balkans?

On the other hand, the autonomy of "popular" or "folkloric" memory poses the question, also dealt with in 1949 in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, of the "transfiguration of history into myth."[51] There, too, the Balkans are a favorite ground on which to verify—by means of folkloric sources[52]—the hypothetical phenomenon of collective memory that Eliade would then generalize to the collection of all "popular memories," in the first chapter of *The Myth of the Eternal Return*—"Archetypes and Repetition." The opposition—developed in

46. Mircea Eliade, "Cum concepe folclorul Moltke Moe" [Moltke Moe's Conception of Folklore], *Cuvântul*, October 7, 1933.

47. Pisi, "I 'Tradizionalisti' . . . ," 62; Spineto, *Mircea Eliade* . . . , 144.

48. Mircea Eliade, "Les livres populaires dans la littérature roumaine," *Zalmoxis* 2 (January 1939): 71: "Les créations populaires . . . se trouvent en quelque sorte 'au milieu,' entre le niveau des principes pures (symbole, métaphysique et magie—qui sont à l'origine de n'importe quel produit populaire) et la réalité immédiate, historique (événements et hommes, qui sont parfois conservés par la mémoire populaire et projetés dans des catégories mythiques)."

49. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 40.

50. Mircea Eliade, "Speologie, istorie, folclor." French translation in Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, 78: "La mémoire populaire conserve des formes mentales primitives que l'histoire ne nous a pas gardées, justement parce qu'elles ne pouvaient s'exprimer sous des formes durables (documents, monuments, graphies, etc.)."

51. Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 37.

52. Mircea Eliade, "Urme istorice în folclorul balcanic" [Historical Traces in the Balkan Folklore], and "Folclor şi istorie" [Folklore and History], *Cuvântul*, March 24 and 25, 1938; Eliade, "Les livres populaires dans la littérature roumaine."

*The Myth of the Eternal Return*, sometimes with examples from Balkan folklore—between *historical event/person* on the one hand and *mythic category/model* on the other, had already been crystallized in his writings at the end of the 1930s[53] and had reached a high level of theoretical elaboration in the *Commentaries on the Legend of Master Manole*. It is no accident that in the *Commentaries* the term "archetype"—used as such or in phrases such as "archetypal laws" or "the archetypal functions of folkloric creation"—is well attested and assumes, as Natale Spineto notes, "a more evident methodological meaning"[54] than in its few earlier occurrences. The *Commentaries*—which herald *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, including its use of the term "archetype"—is a text built as a crossroads around a pan-Balkan legend, which draws comparisons within the universe of folkloric productions that so intensely interested Eliade in the 1930s, and which condenses all the results of the stage in his thinking that begins in 1937.

The "traditionalists"—Guénon, Evola, Coomaraswamy—were surely not the ones who introduced Eliade to folklore, for he had used it as a source ever since reading Frazer in his youth. But Eliade's responsiveness to folklore as a source for the history of religions dramatically increased when the rediscovery of symbols and the positive evaluation of myths appeared to him as the decisive instruments that could give him access to a buried "primitive" or "folkloric mentality" and thus find a way around and beyond historicism. In 1939 he would write that "all scholars agree on the fact that popular legends have their origin in a kernel which belongs not to 'literature' but to mythology and religion; in other words, a pre-history."[55] It was on the grounds of this "pre-history" of the human mind, alive in folklore, that Eliade realized, around 1940, the strong connection that Bryan Rennie described, between the categories of "myth"—bearer of archetypal actions and characters—and that of "religion," which were later to become inseparable.[56]

But Eliade's ambition to see Romanian and Balkan excellence revealed in the field of a history of religions that drew its material from the prehistory and folklore of the peninsula weighed on his conception of myth up to his *Commentaries on the Legend of Master Manole*. Indeed, unless I am mistaken, it is in this text that one finds for the last time in his writings the notion of a people's

53. Eliade, "Urme istorice în folclorul balcanic"; Eliade, "Folclor şi istorie."

54. Spineto, *Mircea Eliade . . .* , 174.

55. Eliade, "Les livres populaires dans la culture roumaine," 68: "Tous les auteurs sont d'accord sur le fait que les légendes populaires ont à leur origine un noyau qui n'appartient pas à la 'littérature,' mais à la mythologie et à la religion; en d'autres termes, une préhistoire."

56. Bryan Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 219.

"central myth." The notion of myth itself was at first, as early as 1932–33, linked to that of a culture's "central or defining myth." If the myth of Don Quixote is the standard-bearing myth of the Spanish, will it not then be Romanian folklore that will provide Romanian culture with the same type of myth? Eliade asks himself this shortly after his return from India. "Youth without old age and life without death," he writes in 1933, quoting the title of a famous Romanian folktale. "Do not myths of this type represent the central drama of a civilization?"[57] Ten years later, one of the conclusions of *The Commentaries on the Legend of Master Manole* resonates as an answer to this question: "It is possible to state that the legend of Master Manole is one of the central myths of the spirituality of the peoples of southeast Europe, in particular the Romanians."[58]

Because of his education, Eliade at that time still closely associated Orientalism with the history of religions. The appeal he felt for the East dated from his adolescence. Through the decisive experience of his stay in India, and in his writings during the 1930s, it nourished Eliade's attempts to define and represent this space, ending with his inclusion of southeast Europe in a greater Oriental spiritual area. The Orient thus provided the first great backdrop on which Eliade projected the specificity of southeast Europe as he understood it in the light of the prehistoric and folkloric legacy of the region.

This association of the Romanian sphere and southeast Europe with the Orient was to remain a permanent trait of Eliade's thinking until his last days. It first appeared in a number of articles he published in Romanian weekly journals or cultural reviews between 1933 and 1939.[59] The link between southeast Europe and Asia is less abruptly formulated in his 1970 collection, *Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God*, than in his writings from the 1930s, but even in the former period, in the correspondence with his friend the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica, it is possible to see the enduring temptation to imagine the Balkans as being distinct from the rest of Europe and essentially oriented toward the East and its "primitive" roots: "If we [the Romanians] so resemble the 'Orientals,' it is not because we have been 'Turkishized' but because, in Romania, as

57. Mircea Eliade, "Despre tinereţe şi bătrâneţe" [On Youth and Old Age], *Vremea*, February 19, 1933.

58. Mircea Eliade, *Commentaires sur la légende du maître Manole* (Paris: L'Herne, 1994), 221: "On peut affirmer que la légende de maître Manole est l'un des mythes centraux de la spiritualité des peuples du Sud-est européen, en particulier des Roumains."

59. Eliade, "Să învăţăm turceşte!" [Let's Learn Turkish!"], *Cuvântul*, August 28, 1933; Eliade, "O ruşine naţională" [A National Disgrace], *Vremea*, November 4, 1934; Eliade, "Demonologie indiană şi o legendă românească" [Indian Demonology and a Romanian Folktale], *Revista Fundaţiilor Regale*, December 1937, 644–49; Eliade, "Un institut oriental" [An Oriental Institute], *Cuvântul* (February 14, 1938); Eliade, "Când Asia devine asiatica" [When Asia Becomes Asian], *Vremea*, March 27, 1938; "Orientul viu" [The Living Orient], *Cuvântul*, April 14, 1938; Eliade, "Echos d'Orient," *Cuvântul*, April 16, 1938; Eliade, "Mediterana şi Oceanul Indian" [The Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean], *Revista Fundaţiilor Regale*, October 1939), 203–8.

in all of southeast Europe and in all of Asia, the genius of Neolithic creativity has endured until very recently,"[60] Eliade wrote to Noica in August 1981.

In the 1930s, Eliade takes up in renewed terms the question of Romanian identity that had raged in the intellectual world of the 1920s: Must Romanian culture finally turn to the West or, on the contrary, return to its roots, the spiritual matrix of the East? If, for those engaged in the discussion in the 1920s, the East was nothing other than Byzantium and Orthodox Christianity, what Eliade called "the living Orient"[61] meant a geographic and cultural area that was both much greater and much older and that the preceding discussions on the sources of Romanian identity had never considered. In those articles, Eliade argued for the repositioning of this identity on new foundations that implied an alternative temporality, memory, and geography: instead of the Middle Ages so dear to national historiography, a prehistory and protohistory that would link the Balkans to the Levant, to Iran, India, and China; instead of the West and its historical memory, the East, its mythical memory, and its preference for symbolic languages.

At the end of the 1930s, in Eliade's writings, terms such as "prehistory" and "folklore" are never far from the word "Orient." He highlights a number of times the elements that in his opinion connect Romanian folklore to Iranian mythology or Indian demonology.[62] Furthermore, and at the same time, the prehistoric Balkans represent the western end of a vast Oriental geographic and cultural area structured along two axes. The first links the ancient Dacia to central Asia, even to China;[63] Eliade liked to see, among others, similarities between the Neolithic ceramics of Cucuteni-Tripolye and the Chinese one of Yang-shao.[64] The other, more important axis links the Pacific to the Mediterranean by way of India and the Near East.[65] This second axis, along which Neolithic culture developed, at one time brought the human settlements of South Asia and southern Europe closer together. History would later destroy this prehistoric unity, but, Eliade stressed in October 1939, "a considerable number of facts cannot be satisfactorily explained unless one takes into account a long and fruitful Indo-Mediterranean pre-history."[66]

To uncover the true importance of the Balkan area as well as the roots of its identity presupposed recognizing its essentially "Oriental" nature and the

60. Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America . . .* , vol. 2, 413.
61. Mircea Eliade, "Orientul viu," *Cuvântul*, April 14, 1938.
62. Eliade, "O ruşine naţionala;" Eliade, "Demonologie indiană."
63. Eliade, "Orientul viu."
64. Idem.
65. Eliade, "Mediterana şi Oceanul Indian," 205.
66. Ibid.

generative role of prehistory but also taking into account its folklore as the key to pre-Christian myths and symbols. It may be said that, at that point in Eliade's thinking, the Orient was the true field of historians of religions, and Orientalism was, up to a certain point, just another name for the history of religions, whereas the West and its medieval cities—which "participate in history only because they had a dozen men who were able to write and left a few hundred documents"[67]—fall under the province of historians *tout court*. This explains his repeated yet fruitless calls for the creation of an Oriental institute or a chair of Oriental studies in Bucharest in the 1930s. If in 1933 he was pleased by the recent progresses of Ottoman studies in Romania, in which he saw a bridge between southeast Europe and deep Asia,[68] Eliade nevertheless felt it most necessary to criticize the Romanian elites' ignorance of Asian cultures, which he saw as a reprehensible state of intellectual blindness. "Although we stand at the gates of the Orient and the whole of the Orient should be of interest to us because of our historical relationship with its culture . . . , Romania is one of the very few European countries that do not have a university chair of Oriental studies, nor even a research institute for Oriental affairs,"[69] he laments in March 1938. In the same period, Eliade writes: "We forget that Oriental influences are still alive in Romanian language and folklore. We forget that to understand authentic Romanian existence it is of greater moment to know how an Indian peasant dresses and builds his house than the mysteries of Kantian philosophy."[70] One could adduce many other citations that show this sort of exasperation. This "neglect of the Orient" in Romania dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century, according to Eliade, because ever since the 1848 revolution, "we are blinded by all that comes to us from the West,"[71] and Romanians are rather "bothered" by the notion that they could after all belong to an Eastern cultural sphere.[72]

The "Orientalization" of southeast Europe in Eliade's writings of the 1930s and 1940s is but the corollary of his profound convictions about the particular nature that prehistory and folklore gave to this region situated between Asia and Western Europe. No less true is the fact that this very "Orientalization," augmented by an accusation of ignorance addressed to Romanian elites forgetful of the Orient, seeks to open the way for the idea of a necessary promotion of new intellectual skills, represented as capable of revealing the roots of national

67. Mircea Eliade, *Jurnal*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 19.
68. Mircea Eliade, "Să învățăm turcește!" *Cuvântul*, August 28, 1933.
69. Mircea Eliade, "Când Asia devine asiatică," *Vremea*, March 27, 1938.
70. Mircea Eliade, "Un institut oriental," *Cuvântul*, February 14, 1938.
71. Ibid.
72. Eliade, "Orientul viu."

identity at a time of radical change in the European cultural and political spheres.

"Erudition and Romanian culture would be rejuvenated and fertilized by a good grasp of the Orient. . . . This indifference toward Orientalism has stunted a good deal of honorable Romanian intellectual effort,"[73] writes Eliade in a December 1937 article. The foundation, which he so ardently wished for, of a Romanian Oriental institute or of a chair of Oriental studies was, most probably, his idea of a way to covertly make the history of religions a Romanian institution. This interpretation is suggested to us by his positive evaluation of prehistoric studies and of Balkan and Oriental folklore as converging approaches to mythical and symbolic thought, in opposition to a discursive interpretation of the world and to the dominance of historical documents so dear to Western Europe. A realization by Romanian elites of the "Oriental" nature of Romanian identity could have led to the adoption, by the national culture, of the history of religions that Eliade regarded as a novel way to define a national identity. At the same time, it is no accident that he should mention as an example for Romania the creation, in 1933, of the Institute for the Study of the Middle and Far East (IsMEO), based in Rome and headed by Giuseppe Tucci.[74] The geopolitical stakes that led Fascist Italy to found the IsMEO were not lost on Eliade, who would have liked to play the role of a Romanian Tucci, heading an institute focusing not only on the spiritual universes of the Orient but also on "an Asia that [again] becomes Asian" through the national awakenings of its peoples.[75]

Eliade, notably in 1937, also undertakes another attempt to "nationalize" his work as an Orientalist and a historian of religions. In two prefaces,[76] he actually suggests that his scholarly work, in particular the then recently published study of Yoga, also has a political meaning linked to the rise of nationalism as it is represented by the Iron Guard, a political movement he does not mention in the writings in question but to which he belonged from early 1937. What is the relationship between, on the one hand, the attempt to redefine the foundations of Romanian identity combined with this preference for the Orient as the object of the history of religions and, on the other hand, Eliade's Fascist political involvement in the years 1937–38? I shall not go beyond the

73. Eliade, Demonologie indiană, 645.

74. Mircea Eliade, "'Dictatura' şi 'personalitatea'" ["Dictatorship" and "Personality"], *Vremea*, March 28, 1937; Eliade, "Un institut oriental," *Cuvântul*, February 14, 1938.

75. Eliade, "Când Asia devine asiatica"; Eliade, "Orientul viu."

76. Mircea Eliade, ed., "Introducere" [Introduction] to Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, *Scrieri literare, morale şi politice* [Literary, Moral and Political Writings], (Bucharest: Fundația pentru literatură si artă "Regele Carol II," 1937); Eliade, "Preface" to *Cosmologie şi alchimie babiloniană* [Babylonian Cosmology and Alchemy] (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 1937; French translation Gallimard, Paris, 1991).

rough sketch of an answer. Behind the intellectual renewal implied by a positive evaluation of prehistory, of mythical and symbolic thought, Eliade sets as a backdrop a dynamic he salutes: modern political messianisms.[77] When he notes, regarding Romanian intellectuals' and politicians' lack of interest in the Orient, that "it could be said without exaggeration that Romanian culture is still dominated by the spirit of the 1848 revolution,"[78] one sees clearly how much Eliade's position in favor of an "Orientalized" Romanian identity is synonymous with antiliberalism. A Romanian cultural renaissance under the sign of the Orient and of a new value granted to folklore, to myth, and to symbolic thought at the expense of the historicist model goes together with the rejection of the cultural and political effects of the Westernization of Romanian society. It is likely that, to Eliade, there was a homology between, on the one hand, the marginal position of his discipline—the history of religions, devoid of institutional support and intellectual recognition—and, on the other, the position of the subversive radical movement embodied in the 1930s by the Romanian Iron Guard. Despite its nationalism and anti-Semitism, which distilled a state of mind that permeated Romanian society, the Iron Guard remained an "antisystem" movement that would ultimately clash head-on with the state and with traditional Romanian elites.

Ever since his sojourn in India, Eliade had felt—as can be seen in his letters and articles—that his intellectual preoccupations were illegitimate in the eyes of university officials and Romanian intellectual opinion. The rise of the Iron Guard at the end of the 1930s may have seemed to him a unique opportunity to solve, in the context of a general identity crisis, the problem of the marginality of the history of religions in the Romanian cultural landscape. It might thus have been able to move to the center of a renewed national culture rid of the "illusions" and frustrations of identity that arose out of the Westernization of Romania. Here I believe is one of the most plausible motivations for Mircea Eliade's political involvement.

Whether it is identified with the historian of religions' Orient or with the gigantic area traversed by Japanese, Chinese, Indian, or Arab nationalisms, Asia and its relationship with southeast Europe had a profoundly positive image in the articles that Eliade wrote on the eve of the Second World War. This attitude was to stand in contrast with the complexification of the great continent's image that the catastrophe of the Second World War and the Communist takeover in Romania provoked in him. The Soviet victory in Stalingrad revealed another

77. Eliade, "Protohistoire ou Moyen Age," in *Fragmentarium*, 49; Eliade, "Folclor şi creaţie cultă" [Folklore and Élite Culture], *Sânzana*, December 19, 1937.

78. Eliade, "Un institut oriental."

Asia, one he had never mentioned in his writings: "I feel the agony of the men of Stalingrad, Europe's agony, so deeply that I have been branded by it. . . . And from the midst of that Inferno, I hear Aeschylus turning in his grave. He who sang the Greeks' heroic resistance against Asia, now witnesses as Europe is handed over to the Asian hordes."[79] This excerpt from January 1943 reveals the origin of a little-known lecture, entitled "The Double Face of Asia and the Oriental Tradition of Romanian Culture" ("Le double visage de l'Asie et la tradition orientale de la culture roumaine"),[80] that Eliade gave seven years later before a Romanian audience in Paris. Asia, in the meantime, had become a bipolar space, divided between, on the one hand, "the true Orient of humanity's great cultural traditions"[81] and, on the other, "the spirit of the steppes" that "animates Attila's Huns, and the knights of Genghis-Khan or Timur Lenk, and Stalin's invading armies,"[82] not to mention the "Turkish imperialism" that simply prefigured the "Soviet phenomenon."[83] For southeast Europe, the "terror of history"—the central theme of *The Myth of the Eternal Return*—stems from this other Orient and its "indomitable, conquering and eternally barbarous nomadism."[84]

The "history" that is the source of terror did not appear in the prewar writings in which Eliade had explored the relationship between historical memory and "folkloric memory" in southeast Europe. It is precisely this new vision of history and the sight of its most recent irruption in the Balkans—under the guise of the Soviet empire—that allowed Eliade to mention the persistence of archaic collective mechanisms of defense against the terror of historical events. When, in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, he speaks of "agricultural (= traditional) societies of Europe, which obstinately adhere to an ahistorical position and are, by that fact, exposed to the violent attacks of all revolutionary ideologies,"[85] it is obvious that he is writing about the Balkan peasants confronted by the ascendance of Communism. And again it is to the sufferings of the inhabitants of this part of Europe that he alludes in one of his many criticisms of historicism "created and professed above all by thinkers belonging to nations for which history has never been *a continuous terror*."[86] He adds that "these thinkers would

79. Eliade, *Jurnalul portughez*, January 1943, 178.

80. This lecture was given on January 21, 1950, and a French abstract was later published in the *Bulletin du Centre Roumain de Recherches* 1 (1951): 39–42. I am grateful to Liviu Bordaş who kindly sent me this little-known text.

81. Ibid., 42: "Le véritable Orient des grandes traditions culturelles de l'humanité."

82. Ibid., 41: "l'esprit des steppes . . . anime et les Huns d'Attila, et les chevaliers de Gengis-Khan ou Timour Lenk et les armées envahissantes de Staline."

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.: "nomadisme indomptable, conquérant et éternellement barbare."

85. Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 142.

86. Ibid., 152n11.

perhaps have adopted another viewpoint had they belonged to nations marked by the 'fatality of history.'"[87] Between 1937 and 1949, "nations devoid of a glorious Middle Ages" were replaced by "nations for which history was never anything but a continuous terror,"[88] but those nations remained the same—southeast Europe.

The Eliadean quest for the specificity of the history of religions began in the second half of the 1920s, through the influence of the writings of Raffaele Pettazzoni, Vittorio Macchioro, Ernesto Buonaiuti, and Rudolf Otto. It continued after his return from India, and, toward the end of the 1930s, with the critique of the function of Balkan national historiographies in identity construction, Eliade for the first time gave his discipline a specific and novel cultural role that in his eyes strengthened the intellectual autonomy of the history of religions. Eliade's antihistoricism—deeply linked to his view of the autonomy of the history of religions—took form for the first time through a certain vision of archaic religiosity, of mythic memory in southeast Europe, and of the relationship of this region with the Orient. We may add that a visible leaning toward intellectual prophetism—a hypostasis that he admired during the 1930s—is attested in his writings of the time, as well as in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* and in his manifesto *History of Religion and a New Humanism* (1961), which opened the first issue of the journal *History of Religions*.[89] Finally, his representation of the articulation between the particular and the universal in the history of religions was linked to his conviction that—by means of the history of religions—the provincial and marginal area of the Balkans would at last cross the threshold of universality.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Mircea Eliade, "History of Religions and a New Humanism," *History of Religions* 1 (January 1961), 1–8.

# 12

# Fascist Scholars, Fascist Scholarship: The Quest for Ur-Fascism and the Study of Religion

*Elaine Fisher*

## Fascist Scholars, Fascist Scholarship: An Intrinsic Connection?

In a journal entry dated November 8, 1959, Mircea Eliade writes of his *Patterns in Comparative Religion*: "I wonder if the *secret message* of the book has been understood, the 'theology' implied in the history of religions as I decipher and interpret it."[1] Considering the amount of ink that has been spilled over the past two decades on the subject of "crypto-theology" in the Chicago School history of religions, it is ironic that Eliade himself willfully admitted to a confessional agenda as early as 1959. It seems Eliade had little cause for concern; nearly fifty years later, few scholars of religion have failed to grasp his "secret" theological message, and fewer still are prepared to accept it. After all, by translating this theology into methodology, Eliade imports a number of problematic assumptions about the nature of religion as a well-formed object of scholarly inquiry. With good reason, the Romanian-born scholar has often been impeached for his Romantic, ahistoricist morphology as well as his near ontologization of religion as a universal cultural category. What is more intriguing, however, is

1. Mircea Eliade, *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957–1969*, trans. Fred H. Johnson Jr. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 74.

that—despite Eliade's own statement to the contrary—a number of his critics persist in reading Eliade's "secret message" not as a theological overture but as a covert political call to action.

By now, the "Eliade scandal" itself is decades-old news, and the narrative of his life has effectively been rewritten to center on his formative political transgressions in Romania in the 1930s. How Eliade's political career should impact the history of religions in its contemporary incarnation, however, remains a pressing concern. A recent, well-publicized trend in the critical literature traces the formative influences of Eliade's "eccentric" scholarship directly to his checkered political history.[2] Already infamous for his alleged associations with the Romanian Iron Guard, Eliade has come under renewed scrutiny not only on account of his methodology or his politics as discrete but objectionable matters. Rather, a veritable cottage industry has emerged, uncovering evidence that Eliade's academic work in the history of religions is not only methodologically problematical but fundamentally "tainted" by his political associations.

In their strongest forms, these critiques have tended toward outright polemics at the expense of any pretense to academic objectivity. According to Russell McCutcheon, Eliade's fascination with primitive religions "is not so much evidence of an interest in such things as aboriginal societies as it is a *codeword* for his conservative world-view."[3] McCutcheon goes on to claim that in fact, "in a subtle way, all his writings in general seem to betray the familiar elements of at least a nationalist, if not fascist, ideology."[4] Adrianna Berger maintains that Eliade, "an active fascist ideologue," was no historian at all but merely produced "camouflaged restatements of his earlier theories, which originated in the era of Romanian fascism."[5] Berger even goes so far as to locate a genuine threat to the American public in Eliade's works: "nourished by a right-wing radicalism," she contends, his theories are "dangerously reactionary and

2. Notable works include Daniel Dubuisson, *Mythologies du XXe Siecle* (Lille: Presses universitaires de Lille, 1993); Robert Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'Oubli du Fascisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002); Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in the Twentieth Century: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss, and Malinowski* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987); and Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

3. Russell McCutcheon, "The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar," *Queen's Quarterly* 100 (1993): 657, emphasis in original.

4. Ibid.

5. Adriana Berger, "Mircea Eliade: Romanian Fascism and the History of Religions in the United States," in *Tainted Greatness: Antisemitism and Cultural Heroes*, ed. Nancy Harrowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 51–52.

conservative ideas, which resurface not only in the post-Ceausescu Romania *but also in the United States today*."[6]

A number of more subtle critiques nevertheless betray a similar subtext: some feature or features of Eliade's scholarship are typologically, if not intrinsically, "dangerous." Daniel Dubuisson, for instance, makes this assertion with unparalleled and uncharacteristic directness in his *Mythologies of the Twentieth Century*. Eliade, he claims, showed a persistent fascination with sacrifice, mythology, and esoteric religiosity, themes that also enjoyed a certain popularity in Nazi circles. Having situated them in a shared discursive field, however, Dubuisson overextends the historical context of the Third Reich to arrive at an invariable concomitance: "It can never be repeated often enough that for many twentieth-century thinkers there is an indisputable affinity between certain political themes and a certain 'Germanomania.'"[7] By reducing an extensive and varied body of literature to a single strategically selected descriptor, "Germanomania," Dubuisson is able to interpret Eliade's thematic interests as unqualified signifiers of his political beliefs. Moreover, for a number of scholars, these purported political beliefs are no matter of antiquarian or biographical curiosity: McCutcheon, for his part, undertakes his critical study of Eliade's theory explicitly "to demonstrate that indeed Eliade's texts do contain a particular political ideology and that their continued use may further support the propagation and establishment of certain aspects of that politics."[8] McCutcheon leaves his audience puzzled as to precisely what aspects of Eliade's politics may reassert themselves on the contemporary political scene but nevertheless is insistent that the study of Eliade presents a very real political danger.

I hope it will not be gratuitously banal to state that this essay, a contribution to a volume dedicated in part to interrogating the legacy of Mircea Eliade's scholarship, is not ultimately about Mircea Eliade. My intention is not to rehabilitate Eliade's theory of religion, nor do I deny that political associations may have exerted a formative influence on the later intellectual life of a scholar such as Eliade. In fact, I echo McCutcheon in arguing that Eliade serves merely as a case in point to highlight a major trend in the academic study of religion.[9] On the contrary, this essay explores a number of problematic maneuvers Eliade's critics employ in order to correlate certain theories of religion—namely, mythocentric

6. Berger, "Romanian Fascism," 71, emphasis added. Cf. Allan Bloom's argument that the value system of the 1960s represents a potentially threatening recapitulation of an inherently destabilizing German Romanticism in his *Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

7. Daniel Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies: Dumezil, Levi-Strauss, Eliade* (Oakville, Conn.: Equinox, 2006), 224.

8. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 89.

9. Ibid., 18.

and sui generis theories—systematically and intrinsically with Fascist politics. More specifically, I intend to document an instance of rhetorical slippage prevalent in these critiques: the wholesale mapping of Fascist philosophy and political theory onto Eliade's scholarship on the basis of a limited number of associations, and the essentialization and unification of a certain body of discourse, concerned with mythology or religion as such, under the rubric of Fascism because of a genealogical connection to the discursive field of early twentieth-century Europe.

In addition, I intend to explore how these rhetorical maneuvers are the legacy of a specific body of literature popularized by postwar critical theory. This is not to say that Eliade's methodology is not genuinely problematic, as many of his critics have maintained. I will argue, however, that these critiques must be understood in light of their own discursive context—much as these scholars maintain for Eliade—and, consequently, in light of their own implicit political agendas.

## Code Words and Connotation: Does Eliade's Scholarship *Encode* Fascism?

In dissecting the arguments of Eliade's critics, our first task is descriptive: What exactly does it mean to say, as per McCutcheon, that Eliade's scholarship "contains" a specific political ideology? Given postmodern concerns about the nature of textuality, the answer to this question is far from obvious. McCutcheon appears to be claiming that Eliade's writing encodes a certain political ideology that thereafter inheres in the text itself, irrespective of his readers' active engagement with the text. The same assumption tends to authorize Eliade's critics to mark his works as contaminated by attributing certain descriptive labels to his scholarship as a whole. In fact, by and large, critics employ a number of consistently standardized epithets to signal the discursive authority of their commentary. Because of the widespread currency of these usages, Eliade's methodology acquires an entirely new semiotic valence; that is to say, Eliade's scholarship is effectively *diagnosed* as "totalizing," "gnostic," "esoteric," "antinomian," "aesthetic," "elitist," "syncretist," "Nietzchean," "Platonic," "Faustian," "neopagan," "amoral," "lawless," "organic," or "antimodernist." These terms are seldom defined, and even more rarely is their hazardous quality justified. Nevertheless, this rhetorical strategy constructs a direct and unproblematized association with a specific body of social and political discourse: that of prewar Fascist political theory and propaganda.

In short, what McCutcheon and company have successfully established is that Eliade's writings share a number of linguistic features and textual practices with the literature of prewar European academics and politicians. This conclusion is fascinating in its own right but hardly theoretically revelatory

given that the historical situatedness of any discourse has become a truism in the scholarship on religion (and beyond) today. Much more striking are the categories that have crystallized around this laundry list of adjectives, which, conforming to yet another popular truism, reveal as much about the scholars who develop them as they do about the object of study. In this particular case, Eliade's scholarship is most often subsumed under the categories of mythocentric or sui generis theories of religion. In other words, Eliade privileges myth over other features of religion such as ritual or ethics and presupposes some unique feature of religion that cannot be explained away by psychological, sociological, or economic reductionism.

Ivan Strenski, the first scholar to unite these political and methodological critiques, aims to situate Eliade's theories in their proper cultural context by emphasizing precisely these two qualifying traits: ontological presuppositions and a fascination with mythology. These interests, however, do not simply evince a predictable level of intellectual interchange within a geographic and temporal context but are marshaled as direct evidence for the essentially Fascist character of Eliade's theories:

> Eliade was not merely a passive spectator in these cultural movements, perhaps only "reflecting" them in his thinking and deeds: he was an active, if troubled and later transformed, participant in the cultural projects of elements of the Romanian right between the world wars. His thinking about myth, in particular, is a species of this right-wing political thinking, though for some time now it has been given to us in a universalized and at least avowedly apolitical form. Both Eliade's religious vision and the political vision that influenced him share the same framework of a common human project, even if they render it in different "codes." This common "code" can, I think, be summarized as follows.
>
> 1. The radical traditionalism of the Romanian right becomes for Eliade not a mere political programme, but a sweeping ontological judgment upon the material, secular, modern world, asserting the value of nostalgia for the archaic, cosmic and telluric, understood as fundamental human categories.
> 2. The profound mythico-religious, Romanian Orthodox, *cum* "Volkish" feelings of the Romanian right become for Eliade the basis of his dominant religious viewpoint and of the particular *sort* of universal religious vision he embraces—archaic, cosmic, and telluric.[10]

10. Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in the Twentieth Century*, 102.

One year after Eliade's death, Strenski already exhibits an unexplained antipathy toward mythology and ontology, an outlook that remains largely unchanged to this day. Daniel Dubuisson, another foundational figure in the debate in question, subsumes Eliade's worldview under a similar typological model, not only emphasizing Eliade's self-professed concern with religion as such but also attributing a "fundamental" conservative and elitist social program to both the man and his scholarship:

> Would it not be wiser to ask whether, between [Eliade's] metaphysical postulates and the totalitarian and aristocratic regimes [he] dreamt of, there existed an ensemble of constitutive affinities? Now, not only must we answer this last in the affirmative, but we must also add that this coherent ensemble translates into a fundamental ideological scheme. This scheme contains, as a constant, the following three characteristics:
>
> a. an ontological caesura and the priority of Being;
> b. the spiritual superiority of the elite over the popular masses; and
> c. a pessimistic conception of history seen as a decline, from which follows a general decadence—hence the necessity for a *renovatio* conducted by the best and aimed at a return to the Origin (that is, to point [a] above).[11]

These classificatory mechanisms are not as straightforward as they appear. Strenski in particular describes Eliade's theory as a species of a larger genus of politically motivated discourse, but his interest is not the typological categorization "genus" and "species" evoked in the context of the natural sciences or even of Aristotle's categories, and it would be a stretch even to argue that he intended this genus of discourse as a Weberian ideal type. To the contrary, the salient features of Eliade's textual artifacts do not simply associate them with a category of discourse but *encode* a meaning, intention, or "human project," in Strenski's terms. Dubuisson, for his part, claims that Eliade "translates" a preexisting ideology into his work, thus implying that it can be unproblematically recovered by the enterprising scholar. Interestingly enough, Strenski and Dubuisson are not alone in their pretensions to cryptology (accusations of cryptotheology seem to have been taken quite literally here). McCutcheon, as we have seen, also accuses Eliade of encrypting a political message through certain *code words*: accordingly, he advises us to jettison the literal or "academic" meaning of Eliade's theories in favor of a single univocal political subtext.[12]

11. Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*, 235.
12. McCutcheon, "Myth of the Apolitical Scholar," 657.

Hermeneutically speaking, this approach requires a considerably greater degree of substantiation than it has been accorded. At best one might advance the more theoretically lucid argument that the texts in this genus share a common subtext, a tenuous reading if based solely on the frequent occurrence of shared motifs. At worst, however, Strenski's classification is no more than a simple association fallacy: a logical error in which the features of one object are mapped directly onto another by virtue of their association or proximity. Accordingly, if Fascist theorists such as Spengler drew on mythological rhetoric in support of their ideology, interest in mythology as a whole must necessarily be symptomatic of Fascist tendencies. Given the emotionally charged nature of the current debate, it typifies a specific version of the association fallacy, a term first coined by Leo Strauss: the *reductio ad Hitlerum*, or *argumentum ad nazium*.[13] This fallacy not only erroneously transfers the properties of one thing onto another but succeeds in doing so by inspiring fear of associating even indirectly with something as repugnant as National Socialism. This fear factor, nevertheless, does not remedy the obvious fallacy involved: if Hitler enjoyed watercolor painting, then watercolor painting must be Fascist.

To be sure, Strenski is not alone in his reliance on the *reductio ad Hitlerum*. McCutcheon presents a structurally equivalent, if more obviously fallacious, argument:

> Eliade's fascist sympathies seem to saturate his later texts, as is evidenced by: his preoccupation with *volks* religion and the paradigmatic importance of the myths of the peasants of eastern Europe; his Platonic, traditionalist epistemology, whereby meaning inheres in phenomena insomuch as they repeat paradigmatic events in the past (to know is to remember); his disdain for materialistic explanatory schemes that address historical and social factors (e.g. economics or politics); and his later preoccupation with establishing a "new, universal humanism," whereby western technological society would be recreated in a form based on the archaic exemplar of *homo religiosus*.[14]

Here, McCutcheon adduces direct "evidence" for Eliade's "sympathies"—that is to say, his private political beliefs—on the basis of his thematic research interests. The apparently missing link in the argument is the carefully selected

13. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 42–43. "Unfortunately, it does not go without saying that in our examination we must avoid the fallacy that in the last decades has frequently been used as a substitute for the *reductio ad absurdum:* the *reductio ad Hitlerum*. A view is not refuted by the fact that it happened to have been shared by Hitler."

14. McCutcheon, "Myth of the Apolitical Scholar," 658–59.

term "saturate," a purely rhetorical exposition of how authorial intent can manifest itself in textual forms. This slippage permits even the most careful reader to overlook the fact that McCutcheon is locating an encrypted version of Eliade's internal dispositions *within the text itself*. It is one thing to use stylistic similarities as a springboard for a more nuanced investigation of historical influence; it is quite another to posit a consistent one-to-one relationship between choice of subject matter and political belief. The latter position disallows the possibility that discourse can be strategically manipulated for a variety of ends, driving the development of new conceptual objects. As is the case with Dubuisson's "Germanomania," McCutcheon's *reductio* argument essentializes Eliade's scholarship as inherently and univocally Fascist, leaving no room for a more nuanced investigation of his varied textual strategies.

Unfortunately, as I have already suggested, Eliade's critics have not articulated a compelling semiotic model for how Eliade's Fascist sympathies might "saturate" his academic writings. Nevertheless, I would like to take the time to reconstruct a couple of implicit analyses of Eliade's connotation and explain why they fail to do justice to the contextual structure of signification in his scholarship. To this end, I draw on the Jakobsonian tradition of structural semiotics to demonstrate why one cannot coherently maintain that, on the model of Orwellian doublespeak, Eliade's scholarship *contains* encoded signifiers of Fascist ideology. To make such a claim would be to ignore the fact that language does not operate on the model of contagion, spreading ideology through contact with subversive code words. The connotative link between a word and its suggested referent is not an ontological given but must be renewed though repeated acts of semiosis in order for it to remain available as an intersubjective cultural code. Simply put, if a code word is extracted from its original cultural context, it will not have the same meaning when invoked in a new context.

To verify what connotation a given signifier actually carries within a certain context, semioticians such as Roman Jakobson and Roland Barthes have typically employed a technique called the "commutation test." In short, this test is a thought experiment in which the word in question is replaced by a number of synonyms to observe to what degree the overall sentence meaning is changed by this act of substitution. Because synonyms have equivalent referents when extracted from their context, inserting them individually in the sentence will highlight the connotative transformation effected by that context sentence itself. Take, for example, the simple phrase, "The man hit the boy." Now, if we substitute for "boy" words such as "baby," "girl," "child," "pansy," or "thief," we arrive at phrases that connote entirely different scenarios. The sentence "The man hit the pansy" evokes a repugnant justification for a hate crime, whereas "The man hit the thief" aims to justify the man's action as a means of self-defense.

On a more sophisticated level, a similar rhetorical transposition occurs when Eliade's critics replace his terminology with ideologically charged synonyms. While these epithets, such as "elitist," "amoral," or "antimodernist," in fact do accurately describe elements of Eliade's theories when viewed out of context, using them to encapsulate Eliade's scholarship wholesale charges it with an entirely new ideological valence. This substitution is not exegesis, nor is it an academically responsible close reading of the texts at hand. Instead, it is itself an act of creative semiosis, a rhetorical strategy intentionally designed to evoke a concomitance with National Socialism, a register of signification rarely germane to the objects of Eliade's scholarship. For instance, Daniel Dubuisson practices just such "creative hermeneutics" in *The Western Construction of Religion* with the following analysis of a passage from Eliade's *Myth and Reality*.

The passage from Eliade in question is the following:

> It is the specialists in ecstasy, the familiars of fantastic universes, who nourish, increase, and elaborate the traditional mythological motifs. . . . The different specialists in the sacred, from shamans to bards, finally succeed in imposing at least some of their imaginary visions on the respective collectivities. . . . All this is as much as to say that privileged religious experiences, when they are communicated through a sufficiently impressive and fanciful scenario, succeed in imposing models or sources of inspiration on the whole community. In the last analysis, in the archaic communities as everywhere else, culture arises and is renewed through the creative experience of a few individuals.[15]

Effecting a radical semiotic inversion, Dubuisson writes: "According to Eliade, only a spiritual elite, guiding an ethnically homogeneous, largely peasant nation, is capable of giving metaphysical meaning to politics and life."[16]

These passages carry nowhere near the same connotation. Most notably, Dubuisson has replaced Eliade's class terms for the religious virtuoso, "shamans and bards," with the politically loaded equivalent, "spiritual elite." In fact, while Eliade notes that these shamans and bards are few in number, nowhere does he suggest that they play a pivotal role in the politics or economics of archaic society. Another, equally contentious substitution is Dubuisson's "politics" in place of Eliade's terms "community" and "collectivities." The latter are completely devoid of any reference to or evaluation of social structure or power

15. Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 173.

16. Ibid.

relations but simply suggest any aggregate of individuals residing in a shared physical and cultural space. Finally, and perhaps most important, not a single connotation of ethnicity emerges from Eliade's original text. Did Eliade originally intend to say "spiritual elite" and "political," later deciding to mask his true meaning with the sanitized terms "shamans and bards" and "community"? Such a scenario is, to say the least, highly unlikely. In the unlikely event that he did intend such a valence, however, his intention has been lost in the text at hand. Contrary to popular belief, Eliade's scholarship does not by any means *encode* Fascism or any political program.

Perhaps the most fascinating instance of commutation in the Eliade scandal is the liberal use of the word "totalizing" to describe Eliade's academic methodology.[17] Preserved etymologically in the term "totalitarian," the political connotations of a "totalizing" methodology need no explication. Incidentally, however, and perhaps through a poor strategic choice of words in hindsight, Eliade had the misfortune to describe his hermeneutic methodology as a "total hermeneutics," as McCutcheon and others have hastened to point out. To be sure, the term "totalitarianism," as originally popularized by Hannah Arendt, Karl Popper, and others, was solidly grounded in the original usage of Fascist ideologues. For instance, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's chief propaganda minister, famously called for a "totalization" of Germany's war efforts, claiming that "the most radical is just radical enough, and the most total is just total enough to gain victory."[18] In fact, every time Goebbels invokes "totality," "total," or "totalization," he joins these terms syntactically with explicit references to war, violence, or political revolution. Simply put, Goebbels's emphasis on totality makes little sense out of the original context: "Total War."

Is Eliade's "total hermeneutics" a subversive, violent enterprise? Despite the fact that violence, politics, and war are never evoked in the context of his methodological prescriptions, his critics deliberately play on his use of the term "total" to invoke an authoritarian agenda out of context. Steven Wasserstrom, for instance, describes Eliade's study of the androgyne as an "eschatological totality with certain social consequences," as if a totalizing (that is, comprehensive)academic program were self-evidently functionally equivalent to a totalizing

17. On a theoretical level, no discussion of the concept of "totality" would be complete without a thorough investigation of its conceptual work in the philosophy of Levinas, among other postmodern theorists, not to mention notions of universality and wholism as epistemically violent in works such as Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. This is a pressing concern and unfortunately beyond the scope of the present essay.

18. The most comprehensive resource for exploring Fascist linguistic discourse is the aptly named German Propaganda Archive, organized by Professor Randall Bytwerk at Calvin College. The archive contains a substantial number of Goebbels's essays and public addresses, including versions of the text of "Total War" as it was both written and then delivered on February 18, 1943; http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/ (accessed September 4, 2009).

(that is, totalitarian) political regime. Likewise, McCutcheon translates Eliade's "new humanism" into a "totalizing political program." When read in the original context, however, Eliade's "total hermeneutics" simply suggests that the history of religions as an academic discipline aims for a synchronic and diachronic thoroughness—no religious facts are uninteresting or insignificant: "The history of religions is not merely a historical discipline as, for example, are archaeology or numismatics. It is equally a *total hermeneutics*, being called to decipher and explicate every kind of encounter of man with the sacred, from prehistory to our day."[19]

When viewed side by side, Eliade's original usage and his critics' "creative semiotics" are so radically incongruous as to render their critical strategy patently absurd. Why is it, then, that the Eliade scandal has achieved such an alarmist salience in the discipline of religious studies as a whole? I suggest that, whether intended or not, Eliade's critics have invoked the legacy of a body of literature in critical theory with genuine symbolic capital in the academic community at large. Most notably associated with the Frankfurt school, this literature takes its very reason for being as the diagnosis of latent Fascist tendencies within individuals and institutions in the midst of democracy. In the frenzy of postwar cultural trauma, academics of all stripes were mobilized to inoculate the whole of the Western world against a relapse of the century's greatest tragedy. In the process, a scientific, clinical discourse solidified around the diagnostic process; groundbreaking studies were devoted not simply to understanding the origins of totalitarian political institutions but to identifying the numerous symptoms of the authoritarian personality. In this literature, Fascism was not understood merely to be a repressive form of government or even a noxious worldview but a virulent psychological disease, infecting the rational thought process of an individual and spreading uncontrollably, leading eventually to mass hysteria.[20]

Having reexamined critiques of Eliade's "tainted" methodology on a semiotic level, I would now like to reinscribe his thematic interests in their original cultural context, as a contribution toward a more nuanced and less essentialist reading of Eliade's oeuvre. Assuming for the sake of argument that Eliade arrived at his theories on principled grounds rather than "contracting" them from his contagious associates, it is crucial that we reconsider the mid-twentieth-century cultural milieu as itself a social problematic, a dynamic that encouraged Eliade and his contemporaries to interrogate the nature of religion on a similar conceptual level.

19. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 58.

20. See below for a discussion of Adorno's use of Simmel's "viral" model to explain the causes of Fascism.

## The Fascist Personality: A Psychoanalytic Diagnosis

In an effort to reread Eliade's methodology as a response rather than as a regression, I have found it highly instructive to compare the recurrent themes in his work to those of Theodor Adorno, Eliade's near contemporary, who, unlike Eliade, made no secret about his feelings toward the National Socialist regime or toward Fascism in general. In fact, one might argue that we owe our intuitive understanding of what Fascism means as a political ideology and even as a psychological state of being to the work of Adorno and his colleagues at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. Given Adorno's unimpeachable record as an outspoken opponent of totalitarianism in all its manifestations, it is tempting to interpret his theoretical innovations as causally dependent on his political affiliations. That is, we might like to read those positions Adorno regards sympathetically as signifiers of his anti-Fascistic mind-set, as well as those positions he subjects to harsh scrutiny as semiotically covalent with covert antidemocratic and ethnocentric tendencies. This temptation is magnified in the present case, as Adorno happens to locate a Fascist mentality in mythological and esoteric modes of reasoning, and above all the postulation of any ontological universal category, such as Eliade's sui generis "sacred."

Of course, such a project, by equating Adorno's intellectual observations with his political opinions, would engender the very same association fallacy that has been applied to Eliade's work. If we are to understand Adorno's own position as well as Eliade's as historically contingent and inherently subjective, we must resist the temptation to privilege Adorno's own interpretive model as a means of evaluating his ostensive "mentality." In fact, if we survey Adorno's thoughts about religion from an outsider's perspective, an entirely different picture emerges. Historically speaking, the very fact that Adorno and Eliade are troubled by similar issues may be more significant than their radically divergent conclusions. As both men witnessed firsthand the aftermath of the great crisis of the twentieth century, it is also hardly surprising that their visceral reactions to this cultural trauma should be preserved in their academic works. When both wrestle with themes such as history and modernity, the general tone emerging from both of their analyses is one of profound disquiet and disillusionment, and, as I hope to suggest, one that subtly superimposes their own psychological reflexes onto a lawlike model of social causality.

To afford us a clearer understanding of Adorno's antipathy toward the "Eliadean" perspective on religion, I would like to briefly contrast Eliade's and Adorno's sentiments about esotericism—one of Eliade's many research interests that have been flagged as ideologically charged. In particular, Adorno's

essays on astrology locate an insidious totalitarian subtext in what seemed to most mid-twentieth-century Americans to be a harmless pastime. That is to say, for Adorno, astrology and occultism more broadly exemplify the same malignant "pseudorationality" that consumed Europe during the Second World War. On a psychological level, this pseudorationality serves a dual purpose: astrology assuages the sentiments of alienation prevalent under late capitalism while replacing them with a sense of scientific certainty in a higher power. In short, astrology "gives some vague and diffused comfort by making the senseless appear as though it had some hidden and grandiose sense while at the same time corroborating the sense that neither can be sought in the realm of the human nor can be properly grasped by humans."[21]

Of course, Adorno's interest in astrology is no mere coincidence given that occultism as a cultural fashion had flourished in prewar Fascist circles. Eliade, for his part, was no more ignorant of the allure of the occult among the radical right than Adorno. In fact, he maintained a close correspondence with Julian Evola well into his Chicago years, a relationship that was eventually to earn him a great deal of suspicion. Whatever Eliade's personal political beliefs, it is far from inconceivable that Evola's Traditionalist project—in Evola's own mind closely intertwined with his research into occult societies, alchemy, and Orientalism—exerted a formative influence on Eliade's history of religions. In fact, from a purely descriptive standpoint, Eliade's analysis of occult initiatory rituals in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* bears a great deal of similarity to the rhetoric common in Traditionalist circles. In this work, Eliade posits esoteric initiation as the most potent exemplar of initiation as a cross-cultural religious pattern. According to Eliade, secret society initiations, while mirroring exoteric puberty rites of passage, speak to our persistent psychological need for fuller participation in the sacred. Esotericism belies our irrepressible need for radical transcendence: "above all a strong and essentially religious desire to transcend an apparently irreducible existential situation."[22]

Apparently, Eliade and Adorno have more in common than first meets the eye. Although the two men have been placed in diametrically opposing camps by contemporary doxographers, their thematic interests and reasons for pursuing them noticeably converge in the present instance. In fact, discounting the readily apparent difference in poetics and illocutionary intent, Adorno and Eliade give precisely the same reading of occultism; only a familiarity with each

21. Theodor Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. Stephen Crook (New York: Routledge, 2002), 157.

22. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Putnam, Conn.: Spring Publications, 2005), 80.

man's distinctive rhetoric could allow one to guess out of context who had written which definition. The obvious difference lies in their respective evaluation—or valuation—of occultism and its social consequences. Except as a locus of genealogical influence, however, political affiliation need not be read as the primary causal factor. Instead, I will focus on how both Eliade and Adorno respond to the "crisis of modernity" by exploring a distinctive psychological reading of occult or esoteric religiosity. On this reading, the social problems of modernity are inextricably linked to an endemic psychological instability on the level of the individual. In particular, this psychological condition, disease, or need manifests itself most apparently in the changing structure of the religious sphere in the modern world, such as modern man's peculiar fascination with esoteric religion.

Individualism as a general theme is prevalent in Adorno's theoretical work and is often treated in cognitive or psychological terms. In other contexts, most notably the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno complicates the Enlightenment model of individualism and rationality: while the instrumental reason of the Enlightenment afforded a unique opportunity for social liberation, by upholding its own values as universals, it effectively divorced truth from particularity and materiality, ultimately paving the way for radical abuses of power. Fascism, for Adorno and Horkheimer, is simply the Enlightenment turned against itself. In his essays on astrology and the occult, Adorno locates a similar superimposition of the mental and physical in astrological reasoning. In effect, much like the extreme positivism of the physical sciences, astrology foregrounds facts at the expense of critical reasoning, treating knowledge as self-evident "truth" rather than theory. The astrologist, he maintains, adduces pseudoscientific lawlike models for how astronomical events correlate with the phenomenal experiences of an embodied human being, despite the fact that no causal connection between the two realms can be drawn on rational grounds. The same may be said of occultism at large. "Occultism," he writes, "is a reflex action to the subjectification of all meaning, the complement of reification. If, to the living, objective reality seems deaf as never before they try to elicit meaning from it by saying abracadabra."[23]

What prompts an individual to adopt this brand of pseudorationality, this "twilight zone between rationality and unconscious urges"? While Adorno is too much a Kantian to completely abandon hope in instrumental reason, as a Marxist he observes that certain social dynamics encourage individuals to engage in irrational or pseudorational behavior to redress the experiential poverty brought about by the system:

23. Adorno, *Stars Down to Earth*, 174.

> Who wants to survive under present conditions is tempted to "accept" such absurdities, like the verdict of the stars, rather than to penetrate them by thinking which means discomfort in many directions. In this respect, astrology is truly in harmony with a ubiquitous trend. In as much as the social system is the "fate" of most individuals independent of their will and interest, it is projected upon the stars in order thus to obtain a higher degree of dignity and justification in which the individuals hope to participate themselves. At the same time, the idea that the stars, if one only reads them correctly, offer some advice mitigates the very same fear of the inexorability of the social process the stargazer himself creates.[24]

Essentially, Adorno has further problematized individualism on psychological grounds, arguing that astrology preys on the feelings of atomization and personal insecurity induced by radical individualism among disempowered segments of society.[25] While this is largely an orthodox Marxist reading of religion, what is most crucial is that Adorno adopts the individual as the crucial locus of analysis, a maneuver that was largely unfeasible before Freud developed a sophisticated psychoanalytic framework, and largely uninteresting before Freud drew our attention to the weakness of individual rationality and the enormous suggestive power of unconscious drives and neuroses. Predictably, Adorno rarely misses an opportunity to invoke Freud in his discussion of astrology, especially since he is drawn to the model of a psychological disease as an analogy for the deviant rationality of the occult.

Making no attempt to disguise what material he has borrowed from Ernst Simmel, Adorno speaks of occult rationality as a malignant disease contaminating late capitalist society. More interestingly, however, Adorno glosses Simmel's "malignant social disease" in rich Freudian vocabulary, although he often appears indecisive about precisely which form of psychosis is plaguing modern society. Observing how astrological literature promotes an elaborate code of dos and dont's, Adorno likens the astrology aficionado to an obsessive compulsive,[26] while elsewhere he maintains that such a person suffers from paranoid delusions.[27] Painting with broad brushstrokes, Adorno is more interested in simply framing his model of the occult as "pseudorationality" in psychoanalytic terms than attempting to substantiate it with clinical evidence. It is enough to diagnose modern society with a malignant mental pathology that

24. Ibid., 57–58.
25. Ibid., 122. Adorno notes his indebtedness to Mannheim on this point.
26. Ibid., 87.
27. Ibid., 166.

has somehow metastasized to society at large. Adorno even goes so far as to attribute to this cancer of the intellect a separate "social stage" (the Freudian resonances undoubtedly fully intended):

> It is equally dubious to sever psychodynamics altogether from its "social stage." Suffice it to say here that neurotic syndromes and irrational susceptibilities of every kind are present within a large number of people at any time, but that some of them are worked upon specifically during certain periods and that modern mass media tend particularly to fortify reaction formations and defenses concomitant with actual social dependence.[28]

Here, Adorno seems to suggest that when the psychotic dispositions in a number of distinct individuals are brought into alignment through institutions such as the mass media, a general psychotic condition comes into existence as a social fact. A psychotic pattern of behavior, enacted by individuals, becomes institutionalized and culturally accepted. It is this institutionalization of psychosis through the cultural industry that marks one of Adorno's most interesting contributions to social theory, in that he proposes a model that mediates between the individual mind and social and cultural collectivities. Whether he has succeeded in crafting such a model is a much more involved question. In the present context, however, it will suffice to observe that Adorno, whether out of poetic license or theoretical necessity, is compelled to adopt a largely psychoanalytical vocabulary to account for social behavior. Society as a whole, he writes, has a rationality that is infected with a malignant psychotic disease; it is "as though the rationality of the self-maintaining body politic had grown malignant and therewith threatened to destroy the organism."[29] Astrology itself, likewise, is the projection of an obsessive-compulsive social system.[30]

I realize that it would be absurdly ironic to accuse a Marxist dialectician of full-scale cognitivism. Despite the influence of Kant and Husserl, Adorno remains fully cognizant of the difficulties involved in mediating between base and superstructure, and perhaps may be credited with reversing the polarity of the base-superstructure dichotomy by privileging culture over material explanatory factors. Nevertheless, when venturing to explain religion, and the occult in particular, Adorno relies almost entirely on cognitive or psychological levels of explanation; the world outside the mind enters into the equation only to provide an object for the fixations and delusions of the mentally unbalanced

28. Ibid., 75.
29. Ibid., 46–47.
30. Ibid., 87.

occultist. In fact, Adorno explicitly accuses occultists and spiritualists of exclusively privileging the mental over the physical, a maneuver in which he comes dangerously close to confusing his analytic methodology with his object of analysis: "The cardinal sin of occultism is the contamination of mind and existence, the latter becoming itself an attribute of mind. Mind arose out of existence, as an organ for keeping alive. . . . In the concept of mind-in-itself, consciousness has ontologically justified and perpetuated privilege by making it independent of the social principle by which it is constituted."[31]

The fact that Adorno's perspective is as much an unverifiable metaphysical assertion as that of his nameless opponent need not concern us at present. What is interesting is how Adorno reads the essential feature, or "cardinal sin," of occultism as a cognitive phenomenon, an error in judgment. Not once does he consider what types of religious institutions foster occult learning, much less what types of ritual practice occultists of various stripes engage in. In fact, on Adorno's reading, these questions would seem to betray a category error: although the psychotic dispositions prevalent among occultists and astrologers can be causally correlated with social institutions, occultism itself as a psychosis belongs in the sphere of the mental. What is aberrant in occultism, according to Adorno, is not occult practice but the mental dispositions—the twilight "pseudorationality"—that seem to render occult practice intelligible to occultists. Interestingly enough, when Adorno finds the opportunity to remark on religion more broadly, the same cognitivist bias appears in his analysis: religion is a doctrine or a mode of thought, not something one performs, much less a social institution. "Monotheism," he writes, "is decomposing into a second mythology."[32]

Ironically, if one were to substitute for "decomposing" a synonym with a more positive valence, Mircea Eliade would likely agree enthusiastically with Adorno's prophetic vision. Like Adorno, Eliade is intensely concerned with how the structure and function of religion are inexorably changing due to the pressures of modernity. As he elaborates more systematically in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, phenomenal experience for modern man is radically different from that of citizens of traditional societies. Likewise, in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, Eliade states that "Modern man's originality, his newness in comparison with traditional societies, lies precisely in his determination to regard himself as a purely historical being, in his wish to live in a basically desacralized cosmos."[33] As we will see, it is precisely in opposition to this

31. Ibid., 178.
32. Ibid., 172.
33. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, ix.

experiential historicism that the modern occultist expresses the wish to resacralize the world around him, to reintegrate his life into a viable framework of meaning.

With the term "historical," Eliade calls our attention to the same radical particularity that Adorno criticizes in the extreme empiricism of the physical sciences, the fact-based mentality that is fragmenting our analytic capacity. For Eliade, however, this radical particularity stands in contrast not with a Kantian model of sound practical reason but with the mythological and symbolic networks of associations man grafts onto his phenomenal experience. This, of course, is what Eliade terms a *hierophany*—the apparently tangible and irrepressible meaning, or universality, laminated onto a particular material object. It is precisely this sort of holistic, symbolic cultural logic—the logic of the primitive or the sacred as opposed to the modern—that occupies Eliade throughout much of his work.

In what sense, then, is history the enemy for Eliade? Here we encounter another case where the preferred method of the scholar overlaps significantly with the mentality he attributes to his object of study. Eliade's own approach to the history of religions has often been characterized as ahistorical, in that he seems to reify categories such as religion and the sacred as ontological givens regardless of cultural context. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that this unfortunate consequence of Eliade's methodology testifies to the original intention behind much of his scholarship. By contrasting history with sacred (*illud tempus*) or cyclical time, Eliade does not primarily intend to suggest that the historical context of premodern societies should be disregarded entirely by the historian of religions, nor does he ultimately seem to believe that primitives were fundamentally incognizant of temporal change. Rather, Eliade often eschews history as a fundamental axis of analysis because he is interested in theorizing not particular events and societies but rather a particular mentality, a religious *mode* of thinking that by definition is not qualified by a particular geographic or temporal locus. That is to say, a mode of thought, as an abstraction, does not itself exist in any concrete or embodied form. Eliade himself clarifies this point by justifying his adoption of initiation as a cross-cultural category of analysis in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*:

> Like every other cultural fact, the phenomenon of initiation is also a historical fact. In other words, the concrete expressions of initiation are related both to the structure of the respective society and to its history. On the other hand, initiation implies an existential experience—the experience of ritual death and the revelation of the sacred; that is, it exhibits a dimension that is metacultural and

> transhistorical. This is why the same initiatory patterns continue to be active in culturally heterogeneous societies.[34]

Of course, no discussion of Mircea Eliade's view of history and modernity would be complete without mention of the *terror of history* he views as fundamentally characteristic of modern society. In the *Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade maintains that man's innate ability to sacralize the cosmos has been impaired by a "fall," so to speak, into historical thinking. While he does argue that history first entered religious experience when the Judeo-Christian tradition adopted a linear as opposed to a cyclical model of time, modern man, according to Eliade, is particularly afflicted by a certain *terror of history*, a feeling of dread and hopelessness brought about by the great catastrophes of the twentieth century and the sense that such an inordinate degree of human suffering is ultimately meaningless. These events strike us with an appalling poignancy, as unique and irreducible historical facts, because we are unable to fit these disasters into any meaningful framework. Interestingly, Eliade's *terror of history* bears an uncanny resemblance to the neurosis Adorno attributes to astrology readers suffering from the "inexorability of the social process." For both thinkers, the positivistic veracity imputed to social or historical laws and facts seems to foster the very terror or neurosis that is so definitive of the modern, postwar mentality. Moreover, it is on account of this omnipresent terror, Eliade argues, that "we are witnessing a desperate attempt to prohibit the 'events of history' through a regeneration of human societies."[35]

According to Eliade, man inevitably gravitates toward esotericism—toward more experientially pregnant modes of ritual practice—in times of extreme crisis. As a result, on his reading, it is far from surprising that occult movements flourished across Europe throughout the early twentieth century. Esoteric traditions such as Freemasonry, he argues, "illustrate the disorientation of a part of the modern world, the desire to find a substitute for religious faith."[36] While "primitives" had access to a preestablished, culturally sanctioned initiatory framework, modern society as a whole has abandoned the social channels necessary for spiritual renewal. In such a radically desacralized cultural milieu, religious seekers are now forced to look elsewhere for fulfillment and turn increasingly to secret societies and esoteric disciplines. In contrast to Adorno, however, Eliade insists that there is nothing aberrant about this recourse to

34. Ibid., 130.

35. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 153.

36. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 133.

esotericism; the occult for modern man is psychologically salutary, even salvific, in contrast to the conceptual fragmentation and alienation that inevitably result from the radical historicity of the modern. Initiation, whether in archaic times or the modern day, is most fundamentally "the expression of a psychodrama that answers a deep need in the human being."

Of course, contemporary historians of religion are likely to object that an initiation ritual is fundamentally something that is performed, rather than the expression of anything at all; the very idea that a religious practice can *mean* something has in fact been the subject of critical scrutiny in recent years.[37] Still, although ostensibly a structuralist survey of initiatory customs worldwide, Eliade's *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* is in fact scarcely concerned with ritual practice for its own sake. Many of Eliade's former students will readily attest to his incredible breadth of knowledge and encyclopedic grasp of the particularities and details of religious customs worldwide. And yet, to dwell on these particularities would be, for Eliade, not only to miss the point entirely but also to contribute to the fragmentary mentality of radical historicism afflicting us as moderns. A custom, performance, or ritual practice for Eliade is essentially a unique particular, an object out there in the world, which should mean nothing to the historian of religion except as an instantiation of a universal, a religious mode of thought. It is the fundamentally religious *mentality* of man that is afflicted in modern society, and it is religion qua mentality or experience that the modern seeks to cultivate and renew through recourse to esoteric initiation.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect on how this psychologistic model of religion—this religious sensibility or pseudorationality, depending on whose reading we adopt—seems to prefigure, or even directly inform, psychologistic models of political philosophy. This is nowhere more apparent than in Adorno's own social scientific project, *The Authoritarian Personality*. In his introduction to this massive work of quantitative psychology, Adorno clarifies the reasoning behind relocating the study of totalitarian movements, especially their direct causal factors, within the individual personality:

> It may strike the reader that we have placed undue stress upon the personal and the psychological rather than upon the social aspect of prejudice. This is not due to a personal preference for psychological analysis nor to a failure to see that the cause of irrational hostility is

37. Talal Asad's critique of Clifford Geertz's definition of religion is the most celebrated example. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

> in the last instance to be found in social frustration and injustice. Our aim is not merely to describe prejudice but to explain it in order to help in its eradication. That is the challenge we would meet. Eradication means re-education, scientifically planned on the basis of understanding scientifically arrived at. And education in a strict sense is by its nature personal and psychological. Once we understand, for example, how the war experience may in some cases have strengthened personality traits predisposed to group hate, the educational remedies may follow logically. Similarly to expose the psychological tricks in the arsenal of the agitator may help to immunize his prospective victims against them.[38]

While Adorno and his partners retain the Marxist axiom that psychological disturbances are ultimately the result of social causes, such as alienation from the means of production, the solution to the problem of totalitarianism lies squarely within the individual psyche; it is there alone that the true nature of totalitarian tendencies can be diagnosed and eventually eradicated. With nearly a thousand pages of clinical data, Adorno has managed to quantify ethnocentric tendencies and correlate them systematically with political and religious orientation, childhood trauma, educational history, and even personality traits and behaviors such as aggression and dependence. In the process, the Fascist persona becomes naturalized as a discrete object of knowledge, even apart from any political act a Fascist person may engage in or any belief he may profess. The desideratum is the diagnosis of a particular aspect of subjectivity, itself constructed by the clinical discourse. In comparison, one cannot help but recall Foucault's parallel discussion of how sexuality was constituted as a defining feature of subjective identity through the clinical diagnostic process. Now that the "authoritarian personality" has been concretely identified as a type of individual, it is no large step to construct a scientific apparatus aiming to eradicate prejudice in general precisely by diagnosing a totalitarian identity in individuals with significant public exposure. By identifying these pathological individuals, we can prevent them from spreading their contagion to their susceptible audience. To those who have witnessed or participated in the controversy surrounding Mircea Eliade, it is abundantly clear that the same drive toward diagnosing the authoritarian personality continues unabated even today.

38. Theodor Adorno *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950), vii.

## The Quest for Ur-Fascism and the Study of Religion

The fact that "Fascism" as an aggregate term has long captivated the Western imagination has been admirably articulated by the novelist and semiotician Umberto Eco in his article for the *New York Review of Books*, "Ur-Fascism." In its current linguistic signification, Fascism no longer refers to a distinct, historically localized political philosophy but something much broader. "Why was an expression like *fascist pig* used by American radicals thirty years later to refer to a cop who did not approve of their smoking habits? Why didn't they say: *Cagoulard pig, Falangist pig, Ustashe pig, Quisling pig, Nazi pig?*"[39] Partisans on both sides of the Eliade scandal would do well to take Eco's ironic jest to heart; accusations of Fascism appeal not only to our cultural associations with the Nazi regime but to an understanding of some deeper character flaw. Fascism is not a rhetorical taint or a genealogical association but a complete and explicit totalitarian political agenda. After all, Stalin's regime was no less totalitarian on account of lacking esoteric, mythocentric religiosity:

> *Mein Kampf* is a manifesto of a complete political program. Nazism had a theory of racism and of the Aryan chosen people, a precise notion of degenerate art, *entartete Kunst*, a philosophy of the will to power and of the *Übermensch*. Nazism was decidedly anti-Christian and neo-pagan, while Stalin's *Diamat* (the official version of Soviet Marxism) was blatantly materialistic and atheistic. If by totalitarianism one means a regime that subordinates every act of the individual to the state and to its ideology, then both Nazism and Stalinism were true totalitarian regimes.[40]

Despite the fact that the term "Fascism" has been admittedly abstracted from any historical referent, Eco wholeheartedly endorses the quest for Ur-Fascism as a political necessity in today's day and age. In fact, it is precisely because we equate Fascism with its outbreak during and before World War II that Ur-Fascism, shorn of its stereotypical Nazi signifiers, poses such an insidious threat today. Concluding his article with a polythetic classificatory schema, Eco advises his audience to remain alert for symptoms of Fascism in our own backyard. In contrast to the essentialized "Fascism" of World War II, however, "Ur-Fascism" for Eco is an explicit political call to action. It is not a genealogical

39. Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," in *Five Moral Pieces*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Harcourt, 1997).

40. Ibid.

taint but a typology for identifying concrete social trends that may spawn totalitarian movements if left unchecked.

Among Eco's fourteen criteria, only two should legitimately trip the radar screens of critics scrutinizing Eliade's academic theory of religion: valorization of traditional culture and a concomitant rejection of modernism. Even these two characteristics of Eliade's scholarship hardly conform to Eco's definition in its full spirit; one would be on shaky rhetorical ground attributing to him a true "cult of tradition" much less the belief that the Enlightenment was the beginning of modern depravity. Notably missing from Eliade's scholarship is any indication of a call to political action, persecution of disagreement, ethnocentrism, militaristic elitism, hero worship, humiliation of enemies, much less any condemnation of pacifism, Orwellian "Newspeak," or intolerance of difference in gender or sexuality. In short, according to Eco's polythetic definition—designed explicitly to facilitate the diagnosis of hidden Fascist agendas today—the Fascism seems notably absent from Eliade's "Fascism."

Even assuming the most egregious flaws in Eco's classificatory scheme, historians of religion should have learned nothing from the Eliade scandal if not that our discipline is urgently in need of reconsidering the relationship between politics and the academy. The "regnant discourse" has noticeably shifted its center since McCutcheon denounced the study of sui generis religion as invariably repressive and authoritarian. Writing from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 2006, it would be nearly impossible to maintain that hypercontextualized area studies and strict historicism have not become the new "regnant discourse," and this at a time when historiography has long since lost its self-evident objectivity in the social sciences and humanities at large.[41] It should be noted, with all due irony, that area studies departments first gained a foothold in major research universities during the Cold War in direct response to U.S. national security initiatives; even today, young historians of religion are funded as area studies specialists by government grants in the hope that they might thoroughly master the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of regions deemed vital to national security. Extreme contextualization, it would seem, is no less guilty of aiding and abetting American economic imperialism than universalism is of generating neo-Nazi revivals. No scholarship, as McCutcheon himself is only too hasty to point out, is ever politically neutral.

Nevertheless, this postmodern axiom itself does not in and of itself legitimate a priori, ahistorical generalizations about the nature of political institutions.

41. Bryan Rennie, "Religion after Religion, History after History: Postmodern Historiography and the Study of Religions," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 3 (2003): 88, 92–93.

In the end, the question remains: Do we abandon all pretense to detached scholarly objectivity in the face of inevitable political realities? Taking the rhetoric of Eliade's critics seriously would ultimately entail no less. Whatever the conclusion, broad generalizations about the *inherent* nature of Fascism are no less ontological than Eliade's *sacred*. Only a sociological analysis of religion in contemporary American culture can draw a causal link between Eliade's work and Fascism—an analysis that, quite simply, has not yet been attempted.

# 13

# Tracing the Red Thread: Anti-Communist Themes in the Work of Mircea Eliade

*Anne T. Mocko*

Politics, "history"—as they say today—doesn't interest me because all the problems discussed day after day seem to me already resolved.
—Mircea Eliade, journal entry, September 28, 1961

As a very junior scholar, it seems absurd in some measure to add my voice to senior scholars so influenced by or personally close to Mircea Eliade, which has made it at once flattering and strange to have been a part of such an august conversation. Yet I think in this particular case, the voice of a junior scholar is quite a valuable addition. Far from being familiar with Eliade in his heyday, I have come very late to any awareness of Eliade at all, having been in grammar school when Eliade died; this accident of biography means that I have come to the study of religion in a post-Eliadean academy. By the time I had even heard his name, many of the critiques of Eliade's life and work had already been raised, and so probably along with much of my academic generation, I have tended to take it for granted that Eliade is debunked and out of fashion—that like, say, Frazer, he belongs not in continuing conversations but in a museum of our discipline's history. I do not cite Eliade (present project excepted), I do not take on his theories or his methods, and in short have been inclined to be rather smug toward my academic ancestor.

This smugness I have found easy to maintain. Eliade's confident, totalizing methodology sits at odds with the self-critical, particularistic scholarship my generation is encouraged to produce, such that his

work seems old-fashioned at best. Beyond this, however, it has been easy to be smug after being informed that Eliade was a Nazi, or at least something very much like a Nazi. This tainted affiliation has trumped any theory and method debate and proved a shortcut to dismiss the entire Eliadean corpus; it is easy to presume that those of us who are not Nazis are inherently better scholars than those who possibly were, and that we need not ask further questions or offer further arguments.

Beyond the intellectual laziness of being smug, though, I have found there to be something of a difficulty to this approach. Specifically, I did not know quite what I was talking about. I knew essentially nothing about the debate over Eliade's politics—I knew nothing about Romania or the Iron Guard or Romanian participation in World War II, I had read none of the secondary literature on the subject, I had no clear idea how politics were supposed to bear on his academic work—yet I had accepted it as reason enough to disregard Eliade. I seem to have found acceptable not so much an argument *ad hominem* (such as the discussions on Heidegger and Dumézil, whose biographies are taken as cautions to their work, while the work continues to be used), as *de homini*, an argument that began and ended in biography.

It is for this reason that I have taken on the present project, to figure out for myself what Eliade's politics were and how they might be understood to bear on his writing and therefore his legacy. As I began working my way through a variety of Eliadean materials—academic books, personal journals, fiction, prewar journalistic essays—I decided not to try to confirm the "common wisdom" I had received about the Iron Guard. Instead, I took a cue from the work of Eliade's friend Constantin Noica and began to read not for anti-Semitism or crypto-Fascism but for an opposition to Communism. While Eliade nowhere (that I could find) lays out a political philosophy as explicitly or systematically as Noica does, he does make a very substantial number of references to the limitations and dangers of Communism, scattered across his work. I have set as the task of this essay to assemble these fragmentary discussions in order to elicit their patterns, and I consider the resulting picture—though piecemeal, complex, and sometimes quite variable—ultimately to have a basic coherence.

What I have assembled as Eliade's opposition to Communism is in fact a combination of two generally independent strains of Eliade's work: first, an opposition to the theory of Marxism (a theme generally developed in his academic and private writing), and second, an opposition to actual police states, especially Communist and especially in Romania (a theme generally developed in his fiction). Additionally, however, Eliade's opposition to Communism turns out to be the central focus of a broader opposition to authoritarian governments regardless of ideological orientation; this is clear from a number of

references in which he equates Communism and Fascism,[1] and also from the manner in which his journalistic writings of the 1930s evaluate the Nazi movement. It seems to me that not only is there a political voice clearly available at many points in Eliade's work, but that political voice seems consistently to adopt the very same focus: a consistent and emphatic rejection of Communism.

## Marxism

By far the most common thread of Eliade's opposition to Communism is his hostility to Communism's philosophical underpinning, Marxist theory. The ways in which Marxism is treated in Eliade's writings show some variation, both in the degree of threat it is understood to pose and in the kinds of theories and institutions it is likened to. What remains constant, however, is what Eliade regards as Marxism's fatal flaw: it embraces history and triviality at the expense of sacrality, and in so doing, it irreversibly compromises its ability to grant meaning and thus to operate as a constructive human system.

Eliade refers to Marxism frequently but never seems to turn his full and exclusive attention to it. He never defines Marxism or systematically opposes it, yet he invokes the term according to certain clear patterns. Marxism particularly arises in discussions of modernity; it is thus structurally located on the negative side of Eliade's romantic dichotomization of history and culture. In one text in which Eliade characterizes the modern world as "absurd" and the people who inhabit it as "estranged and useless," he describes the problem with Marxism as its failure to boost its adherents out of the "gloomy, tedious, and somehow provincial atmosphere[s]" in which they find themselves.[2] Yet not only does Marxism fail to help, in some writings it is Marxism that is to be blamed for the depressing state of modern human affairs in the first place; in these cases, Marxism is not a symptom or a spectator of meaninglessness but rather its quintessential cause: "It could be that Marxism and the materialist interpretation of history were the last trial of man. . . . To think like a materialist or Marxist means giving up the primordial vocation of man. Consequently, to

1. For this essay, I will be utilizing political terms as I understand Eliade to use them. That is to say, by "Communism," I will be referring to a form of government abstracted from any one variant of a number of Communist governments, though Stalinism will remain the dominant example behind the abstraction. By "Fascism," I will similarly mean a transnational, transhistorical government form, of which the German Nazi movement is one instantiation. (Note that this usage is fully consistent with that of Michael Mann, *Fascists* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004].)

2. Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 24–25.

disappear as man."[3] In this manner, Eliade's treatment of Marxism seems to far surpass an intellectual disagreement, treading instead into ontological territories. For all that Marxism may be an intellectual construct, it is not, in Eliade's view, restricted to abstract or trivial consequences. While Eliade does not here specify the "primordial vocation" that Marxism jeopardizes, the passage nevertheless casts mental processes as the highest form of human endeavor. Thus where he equates Marxism with intellectual triviality, he is in fact charging it with compromising the rich humanity of those who would adopt it.

Far more than in the isolated references to Marxism, however, Eliade's position is clarified by the cluster of terms he habitually pairs with Marxism, particularly historicism, Freudianism, and Christianity. Of the three, historicism is perhaps the most common but also the most slippery and abstract; he seems to mean by it primarily the valorization of history over all other forms of method and reality (though in one place he describes it as "pessimism and nihilism").[4] When paired with Marxism, the two occasionally seem to be treated as synonymous,[5] but more usually historicism is identified as a pervasive Western intellectual mode, of which Marxism is a subset. This relative placement surfaces in formulations such as "[what] is called historicism, *Historismus, storicismo*, as well as Marxism and certain existentialist schools."[6] While Eliade treats Marxism in these instances primarily as an academic methodology, elsewhere he refers to Marxism and historicism together in order to characterize a more diffuse intellectual attitude characteristic of modernity more broadly construed. For example, in one journal entry, he pairs Marxism and historicism as the defining characteristics of the West in contrast to the East: "What the West, through Hegel, Marx, and historicism, considers as the only solution possible (to recognize oneself as the work of history and to take this condition upon oneself) is seen in India as slavery, suffering, and ignorance. Absolute freedom can be conquered only by canceling karma, that is, by abolishing history."[7] In this passage, Eliade works a very characteristic inversion: archaic/East is superior to modern/West. By playing on the opposition of freedom and slavery, Eliade argues that the West has misrecognized the contingent for the ultimate, that it has substituted historical events for cosmic realities. Thus, Eliade seems to suggest that Marxism (through its relentless orientation to history) functions to block religion and prevent the modern world from discovering and inhabiting the spiritual world of the East.

3. Eliade, *No Souvenirs* 86 (January 6, 1960).

4. Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, 28–29.

5. Eliade, *No Souvenirs* 129 (May 3, 1961).

6. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (London: Harvill Press, 1960), 233–34.

7. Eliade, *No Souvenirs* 79 (November 22, 1959).

Eliade's rhetorical strategy of paired indictments is perhaps more thoroughly developed in his favorite juxtaposition of Marxism with Freudianism and its offshoots (psychologism, depth psychology, etc.), and as with historicism, these pairings slide between applications to academia or to Western culture more generally. Eliade's chief complaint about Marxism as it relates to Freudianism is that both are reductionistic and thus operate on principles that are "useless, because ineffectual."[8] This tendency to reductionism leads both systems to pursue perverted goals, and in the realm of religion both end up seeking concerns that are opposite to Eliade's: "Freud, like Marx, taught us to find the 'profane' in the 'sacred.'"[9] This prompts Eliade in turn to seek their opposites; thus, in one passage, Eliade argues that where "Marxism and depth psychology have illustrated the efficacy of the so-called demystification when one wants to discover the *true*—or the *original*—significance of a behavior, an action, or a cultural creation, [i]n our case, we have to attempt a demystification in reverse; that is to say, we have to 'demystify' the apparently profane worlds and languages . . . in order to disclose their 'sacred' elements."[10] Eliade's self-portrait as an inversion of Marx and Freud is in part just whimsical, but embedded within it is a programmatic methodological judgment: Eliade sees Freud, Marx, and their followers as quite simply going in the wrong direction, toward the glorification of disheartening minutiae (in the form of materialist and pathological insights) rather than inspiring truths.

Perhaps most intriguing and rhetorically important, however, are the occasions on which Eliade relates Marxism to Christianity, and occasionally to religious traditions more generally.[11] Eliade compares Marxism to Christianity in two distinct ways. First (in contrast to the links drawn to historicism and Freudianism), he opposes them to one another: while Christianity has fallen into the trap of acknowledging the forces of history (and hence is less effective than archaic, history-denying systems), it at least maintains the importance of the sacred—it "does not lead to historicism, but to a theology of history";[12] Marxism by contrast denies any higher realities or purposes, and so is opposite and corrosive to any system that affirms them. Where Christianity once battled

8. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 68.

9. Eliade, *No Souvenirs* 229 (September 1, 1964).

10. Eliade, *Quest*, 126.

11. It seems important to note that (as far as I was able to find) Eliade never relates Marxism and Communism to Judaism. This is a sharp contrast to rhetoric common to interwar Fascism—invoked by the Nazis and occasionally by Codreanu—that Marx was a Jew, the Russian Revolution was a Jewish conspiracy, and their own countries were in danger from "Judeo-Bolshevists." Eliade never makes any of these connections; it is possible that rhetoric against Communists could have carried anti-Semitic valences to interwar readers, but it is not something he explicitly invokes.

12. Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 170.

with the fatalism of astrology, "today Christianity—as well as the spiritualities that are conditioned by it—opposes Marxist determinism. It opposes it in the name of the same belief in man's freedom."[13] Similarly, Marxists limit human existence to the very social conditions that "all religious traditions" seek to counteract: "Every tradition has its own method—an ascesis, a yoga—that helps man recover his true identity and pass from ignorance to knowledge, and from the state of conditioning and subjection to freedom."[14] On his reading, Marxism and religion, especially Christianity, are continually locked in a battle, wherein each denies the premises and goals of the other, always in the name of freedom.

This ultimate similarity between Marxism and religion is reflected in the far more interesting pairings of the two terms, when Eliade suggests that Marxism is like a religion but does religion's jobs less well. Sometimes the comparison to religion simply aligns Marxism with less-savory elements of various traditions—"Marxism doesn't reflect the objective, scientific spirit (not even the spirit of positivism)—but rather the tension and aggressivity of prophetic theologies."[15] More frequently, however, Eliade attributes to Marxism an elaborate mythology and cosmology, as though it were a religion. In one instance, Eliade utilizes this rhetorical strategy to compare Marxism to a "primitive" Melanesian religion:

> The Marxist myth of a golden age, to be introduced by the final triumph of the proletariat, constitutes the most detailed and dazzling of all modern political eschatologies. According to Marx, the classless society of the future will put an end to all the conflicts and tensions which have characterized the history of humanity from its beginnings. There will be . . . a sort of earthly paradise, for man will finally be free and will eat when he is hungry, performing the minimum of work since the machines invented by scientists will look after the rest. It is touching and significant to find at the end of our journey almost the same paradisiacal syndrome that we discovered in the millenarist movements of Melanesia: plenty of food, absolute liberty, abolition of the need to work. All that is missing is the motif of the return of the dead and of immortality. But the fundamental theme is there, though emptied of its religious and eschatological significance.[16]

13. Eliade, *No Souvenirs*, 118 (December 7, 1960).
14. Mircea Eliade, *Journal III, 1970–1978* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 226–27.
15. Eliade, *No Souvenirs* 113 (October 3, 1960).
16. Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 155.

This passage accomplishes two tasks. On the one hand, it deflates Marxism, demoting it to being "just another millenarianism"; from this position, Eliade can patronize it and find it "touching." On the other hand, it suggests that this "dazzling and detailed eschatology" is not quite right, that it is perverted and possibly disastrous because it is political rather than religious, an eschatology "emptied of eschatological significance."

This same sense that Marxism is an imitation of a religion, but one that does not function properly, is revealed in a journal entry from November 6, 1959, where Eliade suggests that Marxism has an eschatology like any religion, but that it has designed its eschatology in such a way as to provide no comfort in the face of a modern crisis:

> A Christian shouldn't fear the bomb too much. For him, the end of the world would have a meaning. That would be the Last Judgment. Nor should a Hindu be concerned with it: Kali Yuga will end by a regression into chaos, after which a new world will appear.
>
> Only the Marxists are right in being terrified by the eventuality of an atomic end, since, for them, paradise is in the future. Paradise has never existed on earth. What corresponds to it, approximately, is the classless society of tomorrow. A Marxist accepts—and takes upon himself—innumerable slaughters solely because the future will be like paradise. All history and all the sufferings of humanity would have no meaning whatsoever if the world were to disappear before having known the Communist eschaton.[17]

This passage emphasizes Marxism's failure to provide comfort to those who might espouse it, its failure to lift people out of the "gloomy, tedious, and somehow provincial" world; there is something of a contrast here to the many passages that seem to suggest that Marxism is profoundly meaningless, for here Eliade suggests that Marxism does indeed hold out hope of some kind of higher meaning. The fact that it is a meaning endlessly (and perhaps tragically) deferred, however, yet again reinforces the ultimate inadequacy of the theory. As in all discussions that relate Marxism to religion, Eliade seems to suggest that Marxism is dangerous not because it represents a radical break from tradition but because it is a broken version of the tradition it seeks to replace—a counterfeit coin with which to redeem society.

17. Eliade, *No Souvenirs* 73.

## Police States

While Eliade spends little time systematically developing arguments about political ideologies, he spends even less time developing theories of government. This balance of interest would seem to reflect his priorities more broadly, mirroring, for example, his understanding that ritual is subservient to myth or his preoccupation with private mystical liberation over institutionalized religious formations. Nevertheless, there are a number of fragmentary or indirect discussions of governments available in Eliade's work, particularly in autobiographical and fictional writings, out of which several clear patterns emerge.

First, Eliade appears to have felt a distrust, if not fear, of invasive government forms, especially those associated with police activities. Second, he seems to have particularly (though not exclusively) associated police states with Communism. Third, his political imagination seems to have remained tied for his entire life to Romania, suggesting that his continuing interest in the dangers of Communist states was less a function of American Cold War politics than of the fate of his native country.

In fact, although Soviet Russia receives clear censure in some works (particularly in passages that will be discussed in the next section), Eliade seems to have had little of the Cold War fear of a global Communist takeover. With the exception of one journal entry in 1949 where he writes, "We *must* leave France, because soon, in a few months or at most a year, Russia will occupy all of Europe,"[18] on the whole Eliade seems to have been concerned not with the expansion of Communism but with the relation of Communist states to their citizens, and particularly with the license of law enforcement to intrude into people's lives. Although Eliade himself never lived under a Communist regime, he seems to have felt the dangers of an invasive state quite acutely; he writes in 1946, for example, that "the presence of police, interrogations, and searches gives me a feeling of total insecurity."[19] This wariness of the police apparatus may well stem from his personal experiences under the police state of King Carol, and most particularly the time he spent as a political prisoner. This period of incarceration, he says in his autobiography, made him realize how very vulnerable people are in the face of government oppression; he writes, for example, that upon his release from prison, "now I could not forget how precarious freedom is, and, ultimately, life itself."[20]

18. Mircea Eliade, *Journal I, 1945–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 86 (September 26, 1949).

19. Ibid., 35 (October 16, 1946).

20. Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 76.

Eliade seems to have most thoroughly elaborated this understanding of the precariousness of freedom in his fiction, and he casts several of his short stories and novellas against the backdrops of police states. In these stories, Eliade depicts government authorities as routinely invading citizens' lives—interrogating them, imprisoning them, carrying out surveillance on them. These authoritarian figures, however, are ultimately unable to control the situations as they hope to do, for Eliade depicts them as persistently and fundamentally misunderstanding reality: he repeatedly introduces themes of absurdity, and sometimes also forgetfulness, to demonstrate the authorities' incapacity to understand and respond to their situations. This pair of tropes would seem to resonate with other fictionalized critiques of oppressive governments (from authors ranging from Orwell to Kafka to Kundera), suggesting that Eliade can be understood to participate in a broader twentieth-century movement of political critique through nonrealist fiction.

Eliade's novel *The Old Man and the Bureaucrats* (1979) may be the best example of his representation of the inadequacies of a police state, here located in postwar Communist Romania. The novel examines the extended and pointless imprisonment and interrogation of an elderly man, Farama,[21] by officials in the Romanian Communist government. Farama, however, single-handedly (if unintentionally) disrupts the Communist machine: he spins heavily mythologized tales when asked for history and offers holistic explanations instead of linear narratives; he taps into the fears and intrigues of the officials who question him, though he does not apparently intend to do this or recognize that he is doing so. Farama seems to embody an archaic and a mythical reality that defies the police interrogations through his failure to conform to bureaucratic logic. His continuing noncompliance with the authorities' expectations seems to shield him from their invasion of his life: even though he is the one imprisoned, he alters his keepers and remains himself unchanged.

Farama has a second function, though, in illustrating that, for all that the Communist authorities are obsessed with "history," they themselves are curiously lacking in their own histories. Borza, the character Farama has initially come to see, not only denies having been a pupil at Farama's school but denies altogether growing up in Bucharest. But when investigations are made, Borza is confronted by Farama's initial interrogator Dumitrescu, who explains that

> "in the matter of you and the Mantuleasa School it's not his [Farama's] fault. Your name is found on the rolls there between the years 1913

21. Farama is the retired principal of a fictional school located where Eliade's own school was located (ibid., 21); this would seem to emphasize the degree to which Eliade's fiction is in fact autobiographical.

> and 1916, and not at any school in Tei. . . . So it's very probable that you went to Mantuleasa School and you've forgotten it. More than thirty years have passed since then. Who remembers what happened thirty years ago?"
>
> "You suggest that I've forgotten . . ." Borza remarked thoughtfully. "You know, you may be right—I *have* forgotten."[22]

This conversation, in which Dumitrescu is pessimistic about the possibilities that "histories" could stretch beyond thirty years, contrasts sharply with Farama's more mythically cast recollections that span hundreds of years and reach back generations in order to answer basic informational questions. The message seems to be this: by rejecting Farama's style of thought in favor of more "rationalized" forms of approach, the Communists have effectively cut themselves off from even their personal pasts; Farama's reality eludes them, even when they violate his freedom and control the location of his body.

Eliade further develops the notion that Communist authorities violate individual freedom yet remain unable to cope with the situation they have "controlled." In his short story "The Cape," Romanian Communist authorities are confronted by a pair of absurd events: the theft of a uniform from the Military Museum and the circulation of altered copies of the official Communist paper. (The papers have minor alterations to the text, apparently typographical errors, but both are also dated three years before they were actually published—1966 rather than 1969.) The story opens with suspicion falling upon a passerby, who is wearing a cape that appears to be military in origin and who asks whether the year is in fact 1966 or 1969; this small event is construed in its disruptive absurdity as a potential resistance to Communist rule—as one of the officials explains, "'it's a subversive thing. It's against the State.'"[23] This causes the bureaucracy to swing into full gear: investigations are begun, suspects trailed, the Secret Service called, and the wearer of the cape is searched, tried, and sentenced to twenty-five years on invented charges. Yet even after all the official efforts, the result is still absurd: The typographical errors combine as a code to yield "over a hundred messages, composed in fifteen languages. . . . Quotations from Gandhi and the Gospels, from the Charter of the United Nations, from Marcus Aurelius, Confucius, and many other sources of the same sort. . . . [I]t's pacifist propaganda on a global scale."[24] It is a resistance that

22. Mircea Eliade, *The Old Man and the Bureaucrats* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 28.

23. Mircea Eliade, *Youth without Youth and Other Novellas*, trans. Matei Calinescu (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 11.

24. Ibid., 43.

is so obscure that the regime has trouble identifying it, much less containing it, an absurdity that threatens bureaucratic rationalism through its very illogic.

Not all of Eliade's fictional police states are identified as Communist, however. For example, in "Youth without Youth" (also published as "Rejuvenation by Lightning"),[25] King Carol's oppressive wartime government forms part of the environment, though it is a much more minor element of the plot than in the previous two texts. Thus, Carol's security forces form part of the main character Dominic's imaginary landscape—while in the hospital, he worries that he might be in danger if he were to be mistaken for "one of the hidden Legionaries the Siguranta (Security) is looking for."[26] Later, that same obsessive police search for Legionaries is actually turned to his advantage, for by breaking into his library for him, they provide an opportunity for Dominic to regain access to his books: as someone explained to Dominic, "The police staged a search. They pretended that, having learned of your disappearance, one of the wanted Legionaries might have hidden in your library."[27] Yet even when the authorities are being helpful, it is because they have become convinced that the actual experience of Dominic (that his body has reverted to a state of youth as a result of the voltage from a bolt of lightning that struck him) is a hoax that covers up a more mundane threat (the escape of political enemies from the country). Again, the central problem of the government—here royalist rather than Communist—is that it consistently and willfully misrecognizes the fantastic and absurd for mundane threats, falsely believing that if it can but surveil and imprison enough people, it will be able to control everything under its jurisdiction.

In addition to these fictional discussions, Eliade's opposition to invasive state formations is also obliquely available in his category of the "terror of history." The terror of history is one of Eliade's terms that he takes very little trouble to explain, apparently assuming that the sentiment is patently obvious; sometimes, indeed, the term seems to mean little beyond its two main terms: that Eliade considered it terrifying to view the world in terms of history, detail, and change instead of in terms of things that are eternal, universal, and transcendent.[28] This usage seems analytically empty, a simple shorthand for one of Eliade's undeveloped assumptions about the world. However, there are other places where Eliade refers to the terror of history in more detail, where it seems

25. Mircea Eliade, *Mystic Stories: The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 302.

26. Eliade, *Youth without Youth*, 65.

27. Ibid., 79.

28. For example, Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, 2nd paperback ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 159.

to designate the horrors that authoritarian and/or imperialist governments inflict on individuals. This field of references is germane to the present discussion and sheds a new light both on the dangers Eliade saw in invasive governments and on the centrality of his homeland in shaping that view.

Even when Eliade does tie the terror of history to specific historical circumstances, those circumstances can vary substantially in their degree of particularity. In one of his very general uses, the circumstance is identified as "our day," which seems primarily defined by World War II, and the culprit of the terror is "historicism":

> How can the "terror of history" be tolerated from the viewpoint of historicism? Justification of a historical event by the simple fact that it is a historical event, in other words, by the simple fact that it "happened that way," will not go far toward freeing humanity from the terror that the event inspires. . . .
> [I]n our day, when historical pressure no longer allows any escape, how can man tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history—from collective deportations and massacres to atomic bombings—if beyond them he can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning; if they are only the blind play of economic, social, or political forces, or, even worse, only the result of the "liberties" that a minority takes and exercises directly on the stage of universal history?[29]

Present (though not named) is clearly Marxism (as the postulator of the "blind play of economic, social, or political forces"); the "liberties that a minority takes" may also suggest a Fascist model of "will to power." In this passage, while it is governments who are responsible for the "history" (the events prompting the sense of crisis), it is the inadequacy of ideologies that accounts for the "terror."

In fact, while Eliade seems to envision the modern world broadly construed as suffering from the terror of history, his references frequently seem to have a far more particular thrust, identifying the terror of history as something especially suffered by Romania. In the preceding passage, for example, before moving on to the modern world at large, Eliade first singles out Eastern Europe as the special victim of the terror of history:

> We should wish to know, for example, how it would be possible to tolerate, and to justify, the sufferings and annihilation of so many peoples who suffer and are annihilated for the simple reason that their geographical situation sets them in the pathway of history; that

29. Ibid., 150–51.

> they are neighbors of empires in a state of permanent expansion. How justify, for example, the fact that southeastern Europe had to suffer for centuries—and hence to renounce any impulse to a higher historical existence, toward spiritual creation on the universal plane—for the sole reason that it happened to be on the road of the Asiatic invaders and later the neighbor of the Ottoman Empire?[30]

While the locus of the terror continues to be largely ideological, the history here seems to have taken on a new dimension—where most of Eliade's discussions appear to suggest a government oppressing individuals, this would seem to be an instance of governments oppressing other governments, or at least nations and cultures. This theme is further developed in a different text, where Eliade explains that the Romanian people "in the midst of the twentieth-century still conserved [their culture's] immemorial heritage and mythology, although they had lived for a thousand years under the Terror of History; because in this part of Europe, history is essentially limited to invasions, wars, and ruins."[31] This passage is unusual for Eliade, both in its emphasis on the dynamics between groups rather than individuals and in its failure to acknowledge Eliade's driving modern/premodern division of time. Instead of modernity, imperialist invasion is marked as the primary circumstance and agent of the terror of history, potentially opening it up to be an experience irrespective of time or geography.

It is not imperialist invasion or overt acts of warfare, however, that Eliade pairs to the terror of history in a fleeting reference in his autobiography; here, he suggests that other governmental activities can produce it, such as preemptive imprisonment, torture, and assassinations. In this way, Eliade actually names the Iron Guard itself as an agent of the terror of history:

> The "terror of history" was becoming increasingly evident all the time. With horror I learned of the assassination of Nicolae Iorga and V. Madgearu, plus a group of "detainees" awaiting questioning at the Vacaresti Prison. By these assassinations on the night of November 29, the Legionary squads who committed them believed they were avenging Codreanu. In fact, they had nullified the religious meaning of "sacrifice" held by the Legionaries executed under Carol, and had irreparably discredited the Iron Guard, considered from then on as a terrorist and a pro-Nazi movement.[32]

30. Ibid., 151.
31. Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts,* 158.
32. Eliade, *Autobiography,* 85.

This statement was, of course, set down some fifty years after the events and is, moreover, clearly self-serving;[33] it is therefore not useful for understanding Eliade's motivations for participating in the group in the first place.[34] The statement is, however, highly suggestive of his later political imagination, and it is thus curious both that he should match the Iron Guard to his concept of the terror of history (and so class it as participating in something highly regrettable) and that, in a complete reversal, he should apply the terror of history to events so highly specific.

What this identification suggests, though, is that the category of the terror of history is not a wholly abstract, wishy-washy complaint about modernity, but that it can in fact code an attitude toward government, an attitude that moreover resembles the critical ways in which Eliade portrays governments in his fiction. While neither set of references amounts to anything like a manifesto, they nevertheless suggest a consistent basic attitude underlying substantial amounts of Eliade's work over an extended period of time. For all that Eliade seems to have considered himself apolitical, it would seem that he adopted a strong political line: that governments, and the almost unlimited powers they could abrogate, are at best suspicious and at worst reprehensible.

## Twin Dangers: Communism and Fascism

The two preceding lines of analysis suggest that Eliade opposed both the emptiness of Marxist ideology and the oppression of police states; taken together, this makes a rather straightforward opposition to Communism. Given the recurrence of anti-Communist sentiment throughout Eliade's lifetime, this position is not particularly surprising. Moreover, there is no reason why an opposition to Communism should be incompatible with the ultraright, anti-Semitic Nazi sympathies he has been accused of. Eliade has one further commentary on politics, however, that does challenge his characterization as Fascist: specifically, Eliade consistently treats Communism and Fascism together, indicting both as suffering from the same problems, and not infrequently evaluating Fascism more negatively than Communism. At the very least, this suggests that Eliade did not consider himself a Fascist; more important, it suggests that Eliade was opposed to authoritarian governments regardless of those governments' ideological predispositions.

33. Insofar as it suggests that Eliade not only had already finished with the group, but that at the time he had condemned unsavory Iron Guard activities.

34. Although there is in fact a strong resonance to Eliade's portrayal of the Iron Guard in his 1930s journalism, including (for example) his tendency to highlight Christian themes including sacrifice.

As in all articulations of his political sensibilities, the theme that Eliade constantly returns to with reference to Communism and Fascism is freedom, a value that both of them violate, in his opinion. Rather than view this tendency to violate freedom as either contingent or accidental, Eliade sees it as a danger built into the structural logic of each system. As he explains in *Myth of the Eternal Return*, "Marxism and Fascism must lead to the establishment of two types of historical existence: that of the leader (the only really 'free' man) and that of the followers, who find, in the historical existence of the leader, not an archetype of their own existence, but the lawgiver of the gestures that are provisionally permitted them."[35] In this way, Eliade suggests that both systems abuse a fundamental equality between people, illicitly setting up one person above all others and granting to that one person all the benefits of the freedom that should rightly be the possession of every human being. The interesting emphasis here lies in the deterministic "must," underlining the notion that this situation arises not from the wills of individual leader but rather out of a fundamental structural inequality in both systems; that is, both Communism and Fascism are incapable, inherently, of providing human beings with the kind of society they ought to have.

Beyond this basic statement of structural tendencies, Eliade tends to treat the similarities between Communism and Fascism (where Communism is often figured by Soviet Russia, and Fascism nearly always by Nazi Germany) in two different respects: first, to argue that both of them possess mythologies (though ones that operate less effectively than archaic and primitive equivalents), and second that both have been guilty of sanctioning atrocities against their citizens. He pursues the first rhetorical strategy, pairing the two systems based on their mythologies, in two books that are predominantly about archaic myths. Both discussions play into Eliade's enduring romanticism, demonstrating the failures and inadequacies of modern systems when compared with the strengths of premodern analogues. The more developed of these arguments falls in the introduction to *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, in the course of Eliade's discussion of whether or not the modern world possesses mythology. The answer he gives is that there are two mythologies in the modern world—Marxist and Nazi—and both are essentially bastardizations of earlier traditions. Having reviewed and rejected a few examples of modern structures that might be considered mythological, he announces:

> Very different is the case of Marxian communism. . . . [I]t is clear that the author of the *Communist Manifesto* takes up and carries on one of the great eschatological myths of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean

35. Eliade, *Eternal Return*, 157.

> world, namely: the redemptive part to be played by the Just . . . whose sufferings are invoked to change the ontological status of the world. In fact, Marx's classless society . . . [has its] most exact precedent in the myth of the Golden Age. . . . Marx has enriched this venerable myth with a truly messianic Judaeo-Christian ideology . . . by the final struggle between Good and Evil, which may well be compared with the apocalyptic conflict between Christ and Antichrist, ending in the decisive victory of the former. It is indeed significant that Marx turns to his own account the Judaeo-Christian eschatological hope of an *absolute goal of History*.[36]

Eliade then immediately proceeds to compare this hybrid of pagan/Christian ideology with the exclusively pagan adaptations of the Nazis:

> In comparison with the grandeur and the vigorous optimism of the communist myth, the mythology propagated by the National Socialists seems peculiarly inept; and this not only because of the limitations of the racial myth (how could one imagine that the rest of Europe would voluntarily accept submission to a master-race?), but above all because of the fundamental pessimism of the Germanic mythology. In its effort to abolish Christian values and rediscover the spiritual sources of "the race"—that is, of Nordic paganism—Nazism was obliged to try to reanimate the Germanic mythology.
> But from the point of view of the depth-psychologists, such an effort was, in effect, an invitation to collective suicide; for the *eschaton* prophesied and expected by the ancient Germans was the *ragnarok*—that is, a catastrophic *end of the world*. . . . The wonder is, how such a pessimistic vision of the end of history could ever have fired the imagination of even a portion of the German people; and the fact that it did so has not yet ceased to raise problems for the psychologists.[37]

In this passage, although Eliade clearly values the Communist version as more successful than the Nazi (the Communist mythology being characterized as "vigorously optimistic," as opposed to "peculiarly inept" and "limited"), he nevertheless unmistakably dismisses both. In fact, Eliade seems to be rather enjoying himself, overturning Communist claims to revolutionary, atheist originality and passing off Nazism as a dilemma for psychologists (perhaps his own Freudian nemeses). What is crucial, though, is the fact that the success of each system is

36. Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, 25–26.
37. Ibid., 26–27.

to be judged by the possibilities of their mythologies, both of which are mere shadows of the systems they are borrowed from.

A similar pairing of Communist and Nazi mythologies occurs in the subsection entitled "The Myths of the Modern World," in *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts* (reprinted from *Myth and Reality*).[38] Here, however, the emphasis is somewhat different, focusing more on Nazi mythology than on Communist, and specifically more on German racial mythology than on reclamations of Nordic myths; the question is here approached from a discussion of origin tales rather than eschatologies:

> The passion for "noble origin" also explains the racist myth of "Aryanism" which periodically gains currency in the West, especially in Germany. The socio-political contexts of this myth are too well known to require discussion. What is of concern for our study is the fact that the "Aryan" represented at once the primordial Ancestor and the noble "hero," the latter laden with all the virtues that still haunted those who had not managed to reconcile themselves to the ideal of the societies that emerged from the revolutions of 1789 and 1848. The "Aryan" was the exemplary model that must be imitated in order to recover racial "purity," physical strength, nobility, the heroic "ethics" of the glorious and creative "beginnings."[39]

Eliade then moves to Communism, about which he has much less to say here. In fact, rather than launching a fully new argument, the bulk of his comments are taken up with a block quote from the passage above in *Myths, Dreams, Mysteries*, one that he introduces with only the most cursory overview:

> As for Marxist Communism, its eschatological and millennialist structures have been duly noted. We remarked not long ago that Marx had taken over one of the great eschatological myths of the Asianico-Mediterranean world: the redeeming role of the Just Man (in our day, the proletariat), whose sufferings are destined to change the ontological status of the world.[40]

These discussions, and additionally a passing journal reference to Nazism and Communism as "contemporary messianisms,"[41] would seem to indicate a very

38. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 212.

39. Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, 44.

40. Ibid., 44–45; also Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 183–84.

41. Specifically, he complains that his impulse to "cite[ ] from a work by Norman Cohn, in which nazism and communism were considered to be contemporary messianisms," is the reason *Aspects du mythe* was never published in Romania: it was so irretrievably offensive to Communist authorities that "no one there dares take the responsibility for sending the manuscript to the printer." Eliade, *Journal III, 1970–1978*, 125 (September 15, 1973).

particular rhetorical move, something of a double inversion. Eliade not only collapses two political systems commonly regarded as opposite but also subverts the understanding that both are modern systems; he establishes instead continuity over time and discourse, and draws both into the provenance of his analysis of myth.

In contrast to these discussions, which privilege Communism and Fascism together as unique modern forms of mythology, Eliade's discussions of the systematic violence of the two forms of government permit a broader association of the two to other violent government forms (though Communism and Fascism seem to remain paradigmatic, with other examples figuring more peripherally). This pattern of citing both Communism and Fascism as preeminent examples of institutionalized violence is well illustrated by a passage from Eliade's autobiography, where he takes up the issue of his suffering as a political prisoner. Eliade explains that his imprisonment was really not harsh at all, that "the afflictions I suffered [while a political prisoner] were child's play"[42] when compared with the suffering of so many others under government oppression. To demonstrate this assertion, Eliade turns immediately to compare his experience to those of other political prisoners at the time, particularly those who suffered "the terrors of the Soviet and Nazi extermination camps."[43] A few sentences later, however, he returns to explore the atrocities perpetrated by Romania, and he describes the "terror" under Carol (the tortures and assassinations) as prefiguring "the terror unleashed by the Communist party after 1948."[44] In this way, Communism and Fascism (which in the initial statement are clearly aligned with Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany) are mapped onto Communist and royalist Romania—all are guilty of subjecting their citizens to the most appalling bodily suffering: imprisonment, torture, death.

In a separate discussion, the shared violent characteristics of Communism and Fascism (again figured by Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany) are identified as the results of an extreme dichotomization between Good and Evil, of basically Manichean sensibilities. This analysis lends itself to an even broader extension to other violent acts of government, and Eliade ends up weaving Nazis and Soviets together with Aztecs and kamikaze pilots as examples of various efforts to purify the world:

> For the Aztecs, the meaning of human sacrifice lay in their belief that the victims fed and gave strength to the sun god and to the gods

42. Eliade, *Autobiography*, 64.
43. Ibid. It is tempting to read this discussion into the earlier remarks on the terror of history.
44. Ibid.

> generally. For the SS, the annihilation of millions of people in the concentration camps also had a meaning, and even an eschatological one. They believed that they represented Good versus Evil. The same is true of the Japanese suicide pilot. We know what Good was for Nazism: fair-haired, Nordic man, what they called the pure Aryan. And the rest were incarnations of Evil, of the devil.
>
> It was almost a form of Manicheanism: the struggle of Good against Evil. In its early, Iranian form, such dualism meant that every member of the faithful who killed a toad, a serpent, or some other creature of the devil was contributing to the purification of the world and the triumph of Good. It is possible to imagine how those sick men, or zealots, or fanatics—those modern Manicheans—saw Evil as being embodied in certain races: the Jews, the Gypsies. Sacrificing them by the millions was thus not a crime, since they were the incarnation of Evil, of the devil.
>
> Exactly the same can be said about the Gulags and the apocalyptic eschatology of the great Communist "liberation": it sees itself as confronted by enemies that represent Evil, that constitute an obstacle to the triumph of Good, the triumph of liberty, of man, and so on. All that can be compared with the Aztecs: both believed themselves to be justified. The Aztecs believed they were helping the sun god; the Nazis believed they were realizing their historical destiny. And the same is true of the Russians.[45]

The rapid alternation between historical entities seems here to serve to reinforce their essential identity—all are based on a perverted cosmology that allows violence to be enacted in the name of Good, all are indicted under the charge of being "sick men . . . zealots . . . fanatics." What is curious is that, as in the analyses of Communist and Nazi mythologies, Eliade again departs from his more usual model of disjuncture between premodern and modern: here, the modern examples (Soviets, Nazis, Japanese kamikazes) are paired with premodern examples (Aztecs, Zoroastrians) in a way that does not seem to distinguish particularly between them. It suggests that even so central an Eliadean framework as his conceptualization of time exerts less force on his thought than do his political principles, emphasizing the significance of his opposition to Communism and here, too, to Fascism.

45. Mircea Eliade and Claude Henri Rocquet, *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet: With the Essay "Brancusi and Mythology"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 126.

The comparisons between Communism and Fascism as presented in these postwar writings, which consistently liken the two to one another, contrast importantly with the journalistic pieces Eliade composed in the mid-1930s, when he was involved in the Iron Guard. In these writings, Eliade consistently champions Nazism over Communism—on the grounds that Nazism has not perpetrated atrocities against its people.[46] This suggests that even early on, Eliade evaluated government systems on more or less the same principles as he would later: that a government is successful based on the degree to which it preserves freedom and meaning, and that governments that promote violence and meaninglessness ought be condemned and resisted. Thus, the contrast between early and late evaluations would appear to arise not from a changed philosophy but rather from a changed knowledge of the governments in question.

Eliade's essay "On Burning Cathedrals" (1937) provides an excellent example of how quite different valuations of Communism and Nazism nevertheless reflect essentially consistent political ideals. Eliade begins the piece by meditating on the question, "How is it possible that, under a Fascist dictatorship of such a violent anti-Semitism as Hitler's, a synagogue is standing firmly, solidly, at the very heart of Berlin, while on February 6, in Paris, the first thing that the French communists tried to do was to set the cathedrals on fire?"[47] The essay then develops the theme that, whatever might be the flaws of Fascism, they can hardly be compared to the atrocities under Communist regimes, a position he states most forcefully in the following disturbing and rather prescient defense of Hitler:

> Hitler has now complete powers; he could have burnt the synagogues and massacred the Jews. He did neither. Was it by caution, by meekness, by tolerance? Hitler didn't prove to have much of any of these Christian virtues. If he didn't burn, or massacre, it was simply because he didn't encourage the devilish collective hysteria, he did not stir the human beast by ordering preliminary executions. He contented himself with the creation of concentration camps—less bad, at any rate, than the gunshot at the back of the head, or than the gallows. Hitler's regime had its own share of murders. But can one

46. Whether this demonstrates a genuine lack of information or a willful ignorance is not clear, and perhaps not determinable. Lack of information is made somewhat plausible by the fact that most of these essays were composed prior to Kristallnacht (November 1938), and thus prior to the fully public and systematic Nazi enactment of anti-Semitic principles.

47. Mircea Eliade, "On Burning Cathedrals," in *Mircea Eliade: The Legionnaire Texts*, compiled and translated by Oana Godeanu (unpublished), 6; originally appeared in *Vremea* 10, no. 474 (February 7, 1937): 3.

> even compare Hitler's killings to that million and a half in Bolshevik Russia?[48]

The essay concludes, "After all, neither the fascism nor the Hitlerianism, whether good or bad, knew arson or massacre."[49] As repugnant as any endorsement of Hitler must be, it is important to note that his defense is not based on the laudable virtues of Nazism: Hitler comes into the discussion as he relates to the true focus of the essay, namely, Communism, and his performance seems to be evaluated not as *good* but as *less bad*. The suggestion seems to be that the forces antithetical to good government are built into Communism, whereas the forces that preserve society are built into Fascism—that Hitler is better than Stalin not because one is a better person or a better leader but because Hitler is necessarily reined in by the logic of his form of government. It appears to be not so much an endorsement of Nazism as an endorsement of government restrained from the whims of any individual leader; the irony is of course that Eliade could hardly have been more wrong about the Third Reich's ability and inclination to curb "the devilish collective hysteria."

Even in this period, though, Communism and Fascism are likened to one another at one point on the grounds that both are based upon shallow, desacralized modern principles and are thus inferior to the Iron Guard as Eliade understood it. Thus:

> Today the whole world is under the sign of the revolution, but while other peoples experience this revolution in the name either of class struggle or of economic supremacy (the communism), of state supremacy (like fascism) or even of racial supremacy (Nazism), the Legionnaire Movement was born under the sign of the Archangel Michael, and will prevail through the grace of God. This is why, while all the other contemporary revolutions are primarily political, the legionnaire revolution is above all, spiritual and Christian.[50]

He continues later, "I believe in the victory of the Legionnaire Movement because I believe in freedom, in the powers of the soul against all biological and economic determinisms."[51] This position, again, is consonant with Eliade's later-articulated politics: governments are good if they preserve freedom and sacrality; both Communism and Fascism (Nazism) fall down in this regard, though Communism (at least in this period) seems to fall considerably lower.

48. Ibid., 9.

49. Ibid., 10.

50. Mircea Eliade, "Why Do I Believe in the Victory of the Legionnaire Movement?" in *Mircea Eliade: The Legionnaire Texts*, 35; originally appeared in *Buna Vestire* 1, no. 244 (December 17, 1937): 1–2.

51. Ibid., 36.

It is important to note that, although Eliade rejected governments generally held to be either leftist or rightist, his position does not at any point map onto the discourse of "beyond right and left" that became popular among many interwar Fascist groups. The "beyond right and left" discourse envisioned Fascists "transcending" liberalism, conservativism, and Marxism, through the "creation of a new man" on the one hand and the unfettered actions of the nation-state on the other.[52] Eliade does in a few places in his Iron Guard era journalism make reference to the concept of the "new man;"[53] but his rejection of authoritarian government and his apparent endorsement of checks on executive power seem on balance to argue against this Fascist goal. What Eliade seems to advocate is not the boundless authority of a Fascist state, or a paramilitary purification of society, but the rejuvenation of society through nongovernmental (especially religious) means.[54]

Eliade does not make it easy for scholars who wish to interrogate his politics, and it is only through meticulously following scattered traces that any progress is possible. Yet those traces eventually lead us to a clear picture: Eliade's politics are not Nazi but antitotalitarian, not anti-Semitic but anti-Communist; he opposed Marxism, he opposed Communist police states, and he opposed authoritarian governments regardless of any founding political philosophy.

This reading would seem to "exonerate" Eliade to the extent that it would seem to remove him from the ranks of enthusiasts for a Fascist takeover. Nevertheless, Eliade's ideas and his orientation to the world still seem to place him clearly on the far right of the political spectrum, given his romanticism and his desire to save the modern world through archaic utopias. This deeply conservative perspective is both unfashionable in the traditionally left-leaning academy and distasteful to my own views, yet I find an ultraright rejection of government far less dangerous than an ultraright endorsement of paramilitarism. All in all, I do not think that Eliade's politics, and the ways his politics enter his academic work, pose a clear danger to readers; I think it is acceptably safe to agree to disagree with him on the subject of governments and the relationship of religion to them. I will concede the point that politics alone would not be a good reason to be smug, and will consent to return to arguing with Eliade on points of academic theory and method.

52. Mann, *Fascists*, 11, 14–15.

53. For example, in "Why Do I Believe in the Victory of the Legionary Movement?" cited in ibid., 271.

54. Ibid. This position seems particularly possible within the context of the Iron Guard, where religious rhetoric ran unusually high and paramilitary violence was kept to a minimum until after Codreanu's death in 1938.

# 14

# Mircea Eliade's Ambivalent Legacy

*Carlo Ginzburg*

## I

For decades Mircea Eliade enjoyed worldwide fame. A prestigious chair, translations into many languages, honorary degrees, Festschriften, monographs dedicated to his work: Eliade received all the usual signs of academic distinction, and much more.[1] He came to be regarded—some dissenting voices notwithstanding—as a leading authority in the domain of history of religions.[2] In 1987 the multivolume *Encyclopedia of Religion* indirectly confirmed, through the impressive range of its contributors, the leading position of Mircea Eliade, its editor in chief, who had died the year before.[3]

Today, two decades later, Eliade's public image looks very different. He has become once again a controversial figure, as he had been in his youth. This change took place under the impact of the

Many thanks are due to Sam Gilbert for his linguistic revision and to Saverio Marchignoli for his helpful suggestions.

1. For biographical and bibliographic references, see Florin Turcanu, *Mircea Eliade, le prisonnier de l'histoire* (Paris: Découverte, 2003); Natale Spineto, *Mircea Eliade storico delle religioni, con la corrispondenza inedita Mircea Eliade-Károly Kerényi* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2006).

2. Pietro Angelini mentions the critical remarks raised by Leach (1966) and Geertz (1968) in his introduction to Mircea Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), xxviii, xxxiii–xliii. See also Jean Bottéro, "Les histoires des religions," in *Introduction aux sciences humaines des religions*, ed. Henri Desroche and Jean Séguy (Paris: Editions Cujas, 1970), 126n15.

3. See the contributors' list in Natale Spineto, "Mircea Eliade: Éléments pour un bilan historiographique," in *Deux explorateurs de la pensée humaine: Georges Dumézil et Mircea Eliade*, ed. Julien Ries and Natale Spineto (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 178–79n167.

"revelations" concerning Eliade's closeness, in the 1930s and 1940s, to the Iron Guard: the radical right-wing, fiercely anti-Semitic group founded and led by Corneliu Codreanu. (I placed "revelations" in quotation marks because more or less vague rumors concerning Eliade's political orientation had circulated since 1945).[4] A large number of books and articles in various languages have addressed this issue from different, often conflicting angles.[5] The debate about Eliade's political attitudes has deeply (and inevitably) affected the debate on his scholarly work—sometimes at the risk of simplifying a highly complex issue. I will mention one example. The author of a recent monograph concluded that the gist of the discussion of Eliade's political engagement boiled down to whether his "writings could, or can, be interpreted as a justification of theses supported by the Iron Guard in the past, or by similar movements today."[6] If we were to adopt such a narrow-minded perspective, it would be easy to conclude that Eliade's work and his political commitments were completely unrelated. A broader and more flexible approach is needed.[7] I will argue (1) that a relationship between Eliade's interpretive categories and his political attitudes did indeed exist; (2) that the specific forms of that relationship were far from obvious; and (3) that the reception, either actual or potential, of Eliade's work is not necessarily linked either to the context in which it was produced or to its ideological implications.

## II

Beginning in his youth, Eliade felt himself deeply rooted in a culture he perceived as marginal. This ambivalence probably never abandoned him. As a young man he looked for a way out of this Romanian marginality and found it, curiously enough, in Italy (not in France, as one might have expected).[8] Two prominent intellectual heroes of his youth, Giovanni Papini and Raffaele Pettazzoni—the iconoclastic freelance writer and the learned historian of religions who later became an academic icon—can be regarded, retrospectively,

4. See Pietro Angelini, introduction to Mircea Eliade, *Trattato*, xxxix–xxx, with bibliographic references (I will deal with the early Italian reception of Eliade in a different essay).

5. Bibliographic references in Spineto, "Mircea Eliade," 142–48. See especially Daniel Dubuisson, *Impostures et pseudo-science: L'oeuvre de Mircea Eliade* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2005); Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'oubli du fascisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).

6. Spineto, "Mircea Eliade," 153.

7. For an earlier, valuable attempt in the same direction, see Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and Malinowski* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: Macmillan, 1987), 70–128.

8. Cf. Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 75.

as expressions of a different kind of ambivalence, which also ran through Eliade's entire life. But neither his contacts with Italian intellectuals nor his much more important Indian experience provided an escape from Eliade's ruminations on being a Romanian. In *Fragmentarium*, a collection of essays published in 1939, Eliade contrasted history with protohistory, implicitly turning, with a typically nationalist gesture, Romanian marginality into an asset: "It is good to have a great literature, a valuable modern art, a personal philosophy. It is much better to belong to a great spiritual 'tradition' rooted in protohistory, which later has been debased by history."

History was for Eliade the realm of inevitable corruption, as he remarked (with racial overtones). "Belonging to an original race," he explained, was more "glorious" than being one of the "creators of history."[9] But protohistory was not a durable solution. The real turning point in Eliade's approach to these issues took place between 1941 and 1945, during his stay in Lisbon as press secretary at the Romanian legation. We can follow Eliade's reflections through the diary he kept in those years, available until recently only in Spanish translation.[10] This diary, never reworked by its author, is a truly invaluable document, as Florin Turcanu has shown in his fine biographical account.[11] But the intellectual and political trajectory that emerges from the diary—very different from the doctored image of that period conveyed in Eliade's late autobiography—deserves a further, closer look.[12]

## III

Here is an entry dated November 17, 1942:

> How deeply distorted is our vision of history based exclusively on documents! A medieval town "participates" in history simply because a dozen literate individuals left a few hundred documents, while

9. Mircea Eliade, *Fragmentarium* (Paris: L'Herne, 1989 [Bucharest: Vremea, 1939]), 51–52. This article is also quoted by Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 275–76.

10. Mircea Eliade, *Diario portugués*, trans. Joaquín Garrigós (Barcelona: Editorial Kairós, 2001). The edition is exceedingly sloppy. On p. 19 read Lévy-Bruhl instead of Lévi-Strauss; on p. 21 read Panofsky instead of Pankowsky, etc. I checked the relevant passages on the manuscript of the diary, which is preserved at the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago. There is a recent Romanian edition, which I have been unable to see: *Jurnalul Portughez si alte scrieri*, ed. Sorin Alexandrescu, Florin Turcanu, and Mihai Zamfir (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006).

11. See Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 313–42.

12. Angelini's often insightful introduction is weakened by its acritical use of Eliade's autobiographical account: see Eliade, *Trattato*, xv–xvi.

> the deep dramas of Eurasian middle ages, the tensions in the Ponto-Baltic isthmus, "are not interesting" and historians dispatch them in a few sentences.
>
> Therefore, a universal history should not be based on written documents but only on spiritual documents, that is, on myths and beliefs. Europe, and especially western Europe, can be compared to the Orient and to nomadic steppes on the basis of myths, not of documents.
>
> For instance, Romanian history can be set on the same level as western history through our myths.[13]

Eliade was rephrasing the opposition between history and protohistory, by contrasting written documents with myths, western Europe with Eurasian nomadic steppes. In this context, Eliade suggested that Romanian history, following the example of Eurasia, could be raised to the level of Western history only through a comparison based on myths. He mentioned a few of them. But in the allusion to the medieval "tensions in the Ponto-Baltic isthmus," connecting Dantzig to Odessa, one may detect a faint echo of current events. In the next entry of Eliade's diary the threatening sound of war became distinctly audible:

> What makes me mad every time I talk to supporters of the British who react with joy to the possibility that Germany may be defeated, is that, driven by their political passion, they forget the decisive fact of this war: the eruption of Russia into world history. In the past Latins and Greeks joined forces in Constantinople, but allowed the Turks to enter Europe. Three hundred years later [in fact, 500] we, Romanians, must shed our blood to prevent the Turks from entering the heart of Europe. Perhaps this time history is repeating itself.[14]

In commenting on contemporary historical events, Eliade referred not to myths but to history. He looked at the present as a possible repetition of the past: the recurrent struggle of the civilized West against the barbarous Orient, this time enacted by Germany and its allies (including Romania) against Russia. The entry in Eliade's diary is dated November 19, 1942, the very day on which the last stage of the Battle of Stalingrad—the so-called Operation Uranus—had begun. The Soviet troops led by Zhukov encircled the Romanian Third Army, paving the way to the defeat of the German troops—the turning point of the Second World War.

13. Eliade, *Diario portugués*, 59–60 (November 17, 1942).
14. Ibid., 60–61 (November 19, 1942).

For the next two months Eliade, who was following the events from the Romanian legation in Lisbon, refrained from mentioning the war in his diary. Then, on January 28, 1943, three days before the final surrender of von Paulus and his army, Eliade wrote:

> I feel the agony, painfully, of those who are in Stalingrad, the agony of Europe. To bear this tragedy I seek refuge within myself, in the book I am writing, in my thoughts, which turn incessantly to the end of our continent. I kept the war out of this journal, to keep from dying of neurasthenia. . . . In the middle of this hell I hear Aeschylus leaving his tomb. He sang the heroic resistance of the Greeks to Asia; now he stands witness to the lame opposition Europe offers to the Euroasiatic horde. Churchill and Roosevelt met in Casablanca. Neither understands that Stalin is toying with them, that they are the victims of the most tragic farce in the history of the world: the Red murderers (who trump the other political murderers, by acting on a huge scale, on the scale of millions) are awaited as the liberators of Europe.[15]

Once again, Eliade looked at the present through the past, as a repetition of an ancient model. The heroic resistance that the Greeks made against Asia, celebrated by Aeschylus in *The Persians* as a conflict between freedom and despotism, was reenacted (Eliade believed) in the resistance of Europe—Hitler's Europe—to Stalin's Eurasia. This time Eliade referred to Eurasia not as the domain of myth but as the symbol of political mass murder. He did not mention the mass slaughters perpetrated by the Germans (although he must have heard of them), assisted—in the case of the Jassy pogrom of 1941—by Romanians.[16] But Eliade quickly realized, in the quiet haven of Lisbon, that Stalingrad was the beginning of a historic defeat that would affect him too, sooner or later.

## IV

On November 25, 1943, Eliade received a confidential telegram inviting him to apply for a chair in cultural history at the University of Bucharest—it would be his for the asking. Eliade coldly rejected the offer. In his diary he wrote that, having spent two weeks in Paris some time before, he had

15. Ibid., 145. On this passage, see also Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 333–34.
16. Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco*, 325.

> learned something decisive: one cannot attain a universal scientific level if one remains in the limited sphere of a minor culture. I believe that I will have something *great* to say. I believe that I am not merely an intellectual. My ideas, my methods can have an impact on the framework of European thought, but only if I can make those ideas and methods generally available.
>
> I have decided to "penetrate" into Europe in a deeper and more insistent way than I did in the past with my book on *Yoga* and the journal *Zalmoxis*.
>
> My Romanian period, as far as my essays and scientific contributions are concerned, is over.[17]

Behind Eliade's overconfident tone one perceives the attempt to turn a defeat into a victory. But Eliade must have realized that the Europe he was dreaming of conquering was by that time very different from the one which, a year earlier, he had seen from afar agonizing in the snow fields of Stalingrad. Gone were the days when Hitler's armies dominated the continent. On January 29, 1944, Eliade noted in his diary: "I would like to write about a terrible subject: *the terror of history*, the fear of men facing men."[18]

This is apparently the first hint of *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (later republished in English under the title *Cosmos and History*). A year elapsed, one in which Eliade's personal anguish (his first wife, Nina, died in November 1944) painfully mingled with the imminent defeat of Germany and its allies, including Romania. But in Eliade's journal entry for January 3, 1945, one hears a different, curiously detached note: "This moment in history is so mad that all personal pain feels unreal, weightless. If I think about all this, I feel so far away from my country, from Europe, from 1945! These things seem to be so distant, their tragic dimension so mechanical, so external!"[19]

Eliade's effort to distance himself from a painful present (and a painful past) mingled with his customary narcissism. In an entry from this period he wrote: "I have let my beard grow. This reminds me of my crisis in September 1930. Really, whatever it is, I must reinvent myself as a 'new man.'"[20]

The "crisis" to which Eliade was referring was the end of his love affair with the daughter of Surendranath Dasgupta, his Indian teacher, followed by

17. Eliade, *Diario portugués (1941–1945)*, 112–13.

18. Ibid., 119.

19. Ibid., 170.

20. Ibid., 223. See also p. 159 (December 1944) for a parallel between Nina's death and the parting from Maitreyi, his Indian lover.

his enforced departure from Calcutta.[21] He determined to emerge from a crisis, which this time was both personal and public, as a "new man." The entry just cited is dated March 29, 1945—the very month in which Eliade began to write *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, as he noted at the end of the book's foreword.[22]

## V

I am not suggesting that the context in which Eliade began to write *The Myth of the Eternal Return* can explain the meaning of the book. What I am suggesting is that in this case, as in many others, personal and public elements, as well as subjective drives and objective constraints, interacted—and sometimes reinforced each other. On August 22, 1945, Eliade noted in his journal that the French visas for him and his stepdaughter had arrived; they were overjoyed. "*Incipit vita nova*," a new life begins, Eliade commented. Then, a few days later: "Our passports arrived at the consulate. I am delighted to be able to show a passport saying 'profession: writer'! Diplomatic privileges have (at last!) ended. I got my visa: I went to the counter after standing in line like every other happy mortal. *This* is my life. This is the life of all of Europe."[23]

All of this sounds pretty banal. Even the sentence "to start a new life" looks banal in this context, although Eliade attached a special meaning to it, first by quoting it in Latin (an allusion to the beginning of Dante's *Vita Nova*), then developing it in quasi-metaphysical reflections: "The 'past' which constantly weighs on me is the clearest sign that I am a man, that is, that I am living in 'time,' that I have a 'history.'"

Perhaps Eliade was thinking of Heidegger, whose work he had recently begun to read; certainly he was referring to Berdyaiev. Then he commented: "I must connect this to my remarks concerning the regeneration of man through the suppression of time, through a return to an auroral instant, to 'illud tempus.' What is the meaning of *incipit vita nova?* The resumption of Creation. The struggle of man against 'history,' against the irreversible past."[24]

21. Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 464ff.

22. In the French original edition (1949) the foreword is dated "Cascaes, mars 1945. Paris mai 1947" (Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* [Paris: Gallimard, 1949], 14). In the Harper Torchbooks edition, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959), xi, the foreword is dated "Paris, October 1952."

23. Eliade, *Diario portugués (1941–1945)*, 250–51.

24. Ibid., 253 (September 5, 1943). "Incipit vita nova" became the title of the fifth part of Eliade's memoirs (*Les moissons du solstice*, trans. A. Paruit [Paris: Gallimard, 1988], 97).

"I must connect this." In fact, the connection was self-evident: it was provided, Eliade himself noted, by "my remarks concerning the regeneration of man through the suppression of time." Eliade was referring to some notes related to his work in progress, to be entitled *The Myth of the Eternal Return*: a book in which he projected onto a cosmic scale his passionate desire to erase the past—his own past—and to start a new life. So far I have focused on the circumstances that played a role in the book's making; it is time to approach the book itself.

## VI

*Le mythe de l'éternel retour* was published in Paris in 1949, immediately after the *Traité d'histoire des religions*. The two books were written at approximately the same time; they refer to each other and overlap somewhat.[25] The opposition between sacred and profane, between myth and history in the modern sense of the word—the basic categories of the *Traité*—are also the core of *Le mythe*. In both works Eliade, who was never afraid of repeating himself, explained over and over that primitive, or archaic, man echoed in the gestures of everyday life models or archetypes placed outside time. The title and subtitle of the 1949 book—*The Myth of the Eternal Return: Archetypes and Repetitions*—convey in a nutshell Eliade's fundamental ideas about religion. Repetition of atemporal models allowed primitive man to achieve a return to mythical origins.[26]

Today one would immediately associate this idea with Eliade's approach to myth and religion. But the idea in itself was not Eliade's. Let us open a collection of essays cowritten by Karl Kerényi, the Hungarian-born historian of religion, and Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst, published in German in 1941 and translated into English as *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*. Eliade was familiar with the book, which he mentioned, referring to one of Jung's contributions, in the essay on the legend of Master Manole published in 1943.[27] In Kerényi's introductory essay Eliade would have come across a passage arguing that mythical narratives "are always set in a *primordial* time. This return to the origins and to primordiality is a basic feature of every mythology."[28]

25. See Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, vol. 2, 1119.

26. Mircea Eliade, *Trattato di storia delle religioni* (Turin: Einaudi, 1954), 421 (cap. XI, § 154).

27. See Mircea Eliade, "Commenti alla leggenda di Mastro Manole," in *I riti del costruire*, ed. Roberto Scagno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1990), 41n11. See also Ricketts, *Romanian Roots*, vol. 1, 614–15.

28. Karl Kerényi and C. G. Jung, *Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 9–10. German edition, Karl Kerényi and C. G. Jung, *Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie*, 4th rev. ed. (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1951), 8, introductory essay (by Kerényi): "On Origins and Foundation in Mythology."

Eliade echoed this passage nearly *verbatim*, without acknowledgment, in the very first sentence of his essay on Master Manole.[29] It must be noted that in his introductory essay Kerényi had presented the premises for his argument through a series of vivid metaphors:

> Thomas Mann, in his essay on Freud, has spoken with good reason of the "quotation-like life" of the men of mythological times and has illustrated this with images that could not be bettered. Archaic man, he said, stepped back a pace before doing anything, like the toreador poising himself for the death-stroke. He sought an example in the past, and into this he slipped as into a diving-bell in order to plunge, at once protected and distorted, into the problems of the present. In this way his life achieved its own expression and meaning.[30]

More than fifty years ago Ernesto De Martino, the Italian anthropologist, quoted side by side Kerényi's aforementioned passage and a passage from Eliade's *Myth of Eternal Return*, implicitly pointing to their striking similarity.[31] But their relationship was more intricate than De Martino suspected. Kerényi's passage, as quoted by De Martino, did not include the reference to Thomas Mann's essay on Freud, which is missing both in the Italian translation revised by Kerényi and in the German original version of Kerényi's and Jung's *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*. The reference to Thomas Mann was added in the English translation, perhaps by Kerényi himself.[32] But in Mann's essay on Freud the passage included also a reference (also missing in Kerényi's text) to Ortega y Gasset's famous book *The Rebellion of the Masses* (1930).[33] The reference was misleading because the two quotations—Mann's and Ortega's—have a different, even opposite meaning. Ortega was not referring to myth; he contrasted

29. Eliade, *I riti del costruire*, 7.

30. Kerényi and Jung, *Introduction*, 5–6 (*Einführung*, 13). In the Italian translation, revised by the author, *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1948), the introductory pages are entitled "Prolegomena," echoing Karl Otfried Müller, *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1825); see also the reprint with an introduction by K. Kerényi (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970).

31. E. De Martino, "Etnologia e cultura nazionale negli ultimi dieci anni," *Società* 9 (1953): 327; see also P. Angelini, introduction to Mircea Eliade, *Trattato*, xxix. I. P. Culianu commented upon Eliade's use of the word "archetype" referring to Kerényi and Jung's (I. P. Culianu, *Mircea Eliade* [Assisi: Cittadella, 1978], 58). P. Pisi rejected this connection as "absolutely unlikely" for chronological reasons ("I 'tradizionalisti' e la formazione del pensiero di Eliade," in *Confronto con Mircea Eliade. Archetipi mitici e identità storica*, ed. L. Arcella, P. Pisi, and R. Scagno [Milan: Jaca Book, 1998], 43–133, 66–67). Pisi missed Kerényi's echoes, both implicit and explicit, in Eliade's essay on Master Manole. In a similar unperceptive vein, see R. Scagno's introduction to Mircea Eliade, *I riti del costruire*.

32. "Man spricht mit Recht vom 'zitathaften Leben' etc." (*Einführung*, 13).

33. Thomas Mann, "Freud e l'avvenire," in *Nobiltà dello spirito e altri saggi*, ed. Andrea Landolfi, introduction by C. Magris (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1997), 1378–1404; Thomas Mann, *Freud und die Zukunft* (Wien: Bermann-Fischer, 1936).

ancients with moderns, arguing that Greeks and Romans looked at the present from the point of view of the past in a sort of archaizing mode, with a few exceptions—Julius Caesar, for instance, never looked at Alexander the Great as a model.[34] In his brilliant essay "Freud and the Future" (1936), Thomas Mann turned Ortega's remark upside down, arguing that from archaic times myth often shaped history, acting as a preexisting model: an attitude exemplified by Julius Caesar's obsession with the legendary image of Alexander the Great.

Myth as an example for the present, but also as a distorted protection against the present: this idea had a deep impact on Kerényi, with whom Thomas Mann corresponded for decades on myth and mythology.[35] Kerényi acted as an involuntary link between Mann and Eliade. Myth-as-repetition working as a protection against history-as-repetition: this theme, obsessively repeated in Eliade's writings, came from Kerényi, and ultimately from Thomas Mann. But Eliade added his own personal twist to it. On the one hand, he presented myth as an escape from history, a defense against the terror of history, a weapon in the struggle of man against "history"; on the other, he saw the invention of history as a Judaic phenomenon that later became part of the Christian tradition. "The Hebrews," one reads in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, "were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God, and this conception, as we should expect, was taken up and amplified by Christianity."[36] This theme had potential anti-Semitic overtones, as Daniel Dubuisson remarked in commenting upon a passage of Eliade's edited diary, which argues that the Jews, having invented history, were responsible for their own extermination.[37]

The trajectory I have been describing has a somewhat ironical overtone. In the early 1940s Thomas Mann wrote to Kerényi that myth should be taken away from Fascist intellectuals and put to a humanist purpose—a remark Mann was so fond of that he repeated it twice, before applying it to his own novel *Joseph and His Brothers*.[38] Through Kerényi's mediation, Eliade turned myth into a strategy for coming to terms with Fascism's defeat—and his own.

34. José Ortega y Gasset, *La Rebelión de las masas* [*La ribellione delle masse*], trans. Salvatore Battaglia (Rome: Nuove edizioni italiane, 1945), 103–4. Thomas Mann attributed to Ortega the comparison between the archaic man and the toreador, which was in fact his own. During his stay in Lisbon, Eliade met Ortega several times, was duly impressed by him, and read some of his works, including presumably *The Rebellion of the Masses* (see the index to *Diario portugués, ad nomen*).

35. Thomas Mann and Károly Kerényi, *Romanzo e mitologia . . . Un carteggio*, ed. Károly Kerényi, trans. Ervino Pocar (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1960); Károly Kerényi and Thomas Mann, *Felicità difficile: Un carteggio*, ed. Károly Kerényi, trans. Ervino Pocar (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1963).

36. Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, 155; Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 104.

37. Dubuisson, *Impostures et pseudo-science*, 76–81.

38. Mann and Kerényi, *Romanzo e mitologia* 83 (February 18, 1941), 85 (September 7, 1941). See Thomas Mann, "Giuseppe e i suoi fratelli," in *Nobiltà dello spirito* (quoted by Furio Jesi, *Cultura di destra* [Milan: Garzanti, 1979], 39–40, polemically opposing Mann to Eliade).

## VII

In the edited version of his diary, published in the early 1970s, Eliade alluded retrospectively to the trajectory that had led him to exile and international fame: "Only after the intense, frantic period that lasted from 1933 to 1940, was I entitled to 'detach' myself from the Romanian perspective and I began to think and write for a wider audience, in a universal perspective."[39]

Not a single word of this sentence can be taken at face value. The "intense, frantic period" is a euphemism for "my support of the Iron Guard"; the chronology (1933 to 1940) conceals the real turning point, 1942–43; the word "entitled" is part of a clumsy attempt to protect himself against the predictable accusation that he lacked patriotic feelings. Even the reference to the "universal perspective" adopted after the time in exile is ultimately misleading. In the final chapter of *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, entitled "The Terror of History," in which Eliade loosed a fierce attack against historicism, he deliberately left some clues suggesting the specific point of view from which he approached his topic. He spoke of peoples (including, "for example," those of southwestern Europe) "who suffer and are annihilated for the simple reason that their geographical situation sets them in the pathway of history; that they are neighbors of empires in a state of permanent expansion." In the past, Eliade remarked, those sufferings had been accepted because "they had a metahistorical meaning. . . . A very considerable fraction of the population of Europe, to say nothing of the other continents, still lives today by the light of the traditional, anti-'historicistic' viewpoint."[40] While studying those "traditional societies," Eliade discovered a "revolt against concrete, historical time, [a] nostalgia for a periodical return to the mythical time of the beginning of things, to the 'Great Time.'"[41]

There is no need to insist on the personal implications of these passages. One could object that because all scientific discoveries take place in a specific context, the circumstances of their genesis, their subjective implications and so forth, do not necessarily affect their objective value. In principle I agree completely. But to what extent was the "ideology" of "primitive" or "traditional" societies posited in *The Myth of Eternal Return* projected by its author? When Eliade speaks of a "revolt against historical time," a "nostalgia for mythical

39. Mircea Eliade, *Giornale* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1976) [*Fragments d'un journal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973)], 320 (May 15, 1963).

40. Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 151–52.

41. Ibid., xi. The foreword to this American edition, dated November 1958, declares that the manuscript was begun "in May, 1945." The French original edition (1949) is dated "Cascaes, mars 1945. Paris mai 1947" (Eliade, *Le mythe de l'Eternel Retour* [Paris: Gallimard, 1961], 12–13).

time," a "terror of history," is he imposing his own voice over those archaic cultures? The question is rhetorical; Eliade, I suspect, would have dismissed it as irrelevant.

## VIII

I would prefer to take a different approach. I will inscribe *The Myth of Eternal Return* in a constellation of works that might be labeled "writings from Year Zero"—in an homage to Roberto Rossellini's movie *Germany Year Zero*.[42] Mine is a highly heterogeneous group: Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (written in 1940, published posthumously in a nearly private form in 1942, then in 1950); Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (written in 1942–44, published in 1947); Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (written in 1941 and 1942, published posthumously in 1947); Raymond Queneau, *Une histoire modèle* (written in 1942, published in 1966); Ernesto De Martino, *Il mondo magico* (begun in 1941, published in 1948).[43] The format, assumptions, approaches, and conclusions of these works are as different as can be, but all of them (except Eliade's) emerged from a shared experience: the sense of an imminent collapse of civilization, due to the seemingly irresistible advance of Germany and its allies. How, each of these writers asked, could all this happen? This question, generated in a situation of extreme danger, became a question addressed, either explicitly or implicitly, to history as a whole. Does history have a meaning? The answer was sought in different directions: in a quasi-hopeless messianic perspective; in a remote, conjectural past; in laying bare the supposed logic of historical development, and so forth. Marc Bloch, the only historian in the group, raised some different questions: whether historical knowledge was possible, how, to what end.

*The Myth of the Eternal Return* was written as a response not to the triumph of Fascism but to its defeat; it was begun not in 1942 but in 1945. However, from a morphological point of view, it would easily fit in the list of writings I just mentioned. The questions Eliade addressed—Is history inevitable? Why history?—were as radical as theirs, since these questions also emerged from a time of extreme danger, of collapse, of destruction: "the Year Zero."

42. Here I am developing a suggestion I advanced in "'La fine del mondo' di Ernesto De Martino," *Quaderni Storici* 40 (1979): 238–42, echoed by Placido Cherchi, *Il signore del limite: Tre variazioni critiche su Ernesto De Martino* (Naples: Liguori editore, 1994). Pietro Angelini refers to 1940 as "a year zero" for Eliade, a date based on the latter's misleading self-description (introduction to *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, xxii).

43. On this date, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Momigliano e De Martino," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 100 (1988): 400–413.

## IX

Once inscribed in this constellation, Eliade's book appears in a somewhat unexpected light. Notwithstanding the obvious differences in assumptions, style, and content, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* displays some unexpected intersections with the writings I mentioned earlier. I will limit myself to two comparisons, with Ernesto De Martino's *Il mondo magico* (*The World of Magic*) and Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. These comparisons will immediately throw into relief the heterogeneous character of my list.

Born in 1908 (and therefore one year younger than Eliade), Ernesto De Martino subscribed to Benedetto Croce's version of historicism (*storicismo*). However, in *Il mondo magico*, written during the Second World War, De Martino—who participated in the resistance as a member of a small leftist group, "Partito Italiano del Lavoro"—pushed to an extreme Croce's dictum that "life and reality are history, and nothing else."[44] After a detailed discussion of magical powers, De Martino argued that, since "nature is culturally conditioned," in some societies magic did indeed work. Neither reality nor the presence of man in reality should be taken for granted: they are the result of a long historical process, in which magic played a major role, providing a positive answer to a profound anxiety generated by the risk of losing one's presence in the world—a concept clearly indebted to Heidegger's philosophy.[45] Was De Martino's radical version of historicism compatible with Croce's philosophy? According to Croce, it was not. Distressed by the master's sharp comments, De Martino recanted, claiming that *Il mondo magico* was a mere extension of Croce's historicism to non-European cultures.[46]

Notwithstanding their political and ideological differences, Eliade and De Martino took a strong interest in each other's work. De Martino reviewed *The Myth of Eternal Return* and wrote introductions to the Italian translations of two other books by Eliade; Eliade, visiting Italy at the very end of his life, recalled his encounters with De Martino, referring with evident relish to Croce's harsh rejection of De Martino's idea that "nature was culturally conditioned."[47] Many

44. Benedetto Croce, *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (Bari: Laterza, 1938), 51. On De Martino's youthful years see now Giordana Charuty, *Ernesto De Martino. Les vie antérieures d'un anthropologue* (Marseille: editions Parenthèses/MMSH, 2009).

45. Cesare Cases, *Il testimone secondario* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), 132–67 (first published in 1973 as an introduction to a new edition of *Il mondo magico*).

46. See De Martino's notes published by Gennaro Sasso, *Ernesto De Martino fra religione e filosofia* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2001), 280–82.

47. Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal, III [1979–1985]* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 234.

factors facilitated the relationship between Eliade and De Martino. Both of them had been influenced, in their youth, by Vittorio Macchioro, the Italian historian of religion who later became De Martino's father-in-law.[48] They shared a strong antipositivistic attitude—though it became clear, in a public debate they had at Royaumont in 1956, that Eliade was not as willing as De Martino to lay his faith in the reality of magical powers.[49] But the most important link is provided, in my view, by the conceptual core of *Il mondo magico*: the anxiety generated by the risk of losing one's presence in the world. Was this anxiety an experience located outside history or constitutive of history? If the former, De Martino's radical historicism and Eliade's radical antihistoricism would have partially overlapped.[50]

The case of Walter Benjamin is completely different. To my knowledge, Eliade never mentioned Benjamin and possibly never read his writings. In fact, it is difficult to imagine two works more different than Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* and Eliade's *Myth of the Eternal Return*. But both works include a strong rejection of historicism. In the light of this paradoxical convergence, one might conclude that "historicism" is a broad, vague, analytically empty category.[51] I suspect that this is, on a general level, true. But Benjamin attacked historicism (*Historismus*) on a specific ground: its association with a unilinear, teleological vision of history, that implied a number of theoretical and political consequences. Benjamin referred, on the one hand, to the tendency of historicism to present history from the winner's point of view and, on the other, to the self-defeating belief, characteristic of the German Social Democratic Party, that one was part of an irresistible historical wave.[52] Benjamin's insistence on a sharp distinction between historicism and historical materialism would have seemed meaningless to Eliade, who regarded historical materialism as an especially vile version of historicism. Still, the grounds for Eliade's rejection of historicism partially overlapped (although at an infinitely cruder level) with those for Benjamin's, since both men identified historicism with a unilinear vision of history. I said "*partially* overlapped" because Eliade developed his

48. Riccardo Di Donato, *I Greci selvaggi: Antropologia storica di Ernesto De Martino* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 1999). See also Marin Mincu, *Mircea Eliade e l'Italia*, ed. Roberto Scagno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1987), 238–44 (Vittorio Macchioro's letters to Eliade).

49. See the transcripts of the debate between Eliade and De Martino in Pietro Angelini, *L'uomo sul tetto* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001), 126–39 (formerly published by S. Barbera, *Belfagor* 53 [1988]: 455–65).

50. Here I am expanding a remark I made elsewhere (Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia notturna* [Turin: Einaudi, 1989], 183n70; Ginzburg, *Ecstasies* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991], 203n70).

51. In a feeble footnote added to the revised edition of *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade hastily referred to the various meanings of "historism" or "historicism" (*Cosmos and History*, 150n10).

52. Walter Benjamin, *Sul concetto di storia*, ed. Gianfranco Bonola and Michele Ranchetti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997). This edition includes different versions of the *Theses*, both in German and in Italian translation, and a commentary.

rejection of historicism, which he viewed as the ideological justification of the historical process, into the peculiar notion of "the terror of history," a manifestation of history as terror. Though he later denied it, for Eliade the rejection of historicism turned into a rejection of history.

## X

Today historicism is often regarded as the ideological justification for globalization. Arguments raised against globalized capitalism are often associated with the rejection of historicism, as in Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential book, *Provincializing Europe*.[53] Historicism, Chakrabarty argued, implies an idea of uniform development based on a conception of time that is, "in the famous words of Walter Benjamin, the secular, empty, and homogeneous time of history." Cited in the corresponding footnote, the passage from Benjamin's fourteenth thesis reads a bit differently: "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]."[54] The word "secular" is missing: it is not Benjamin's but Chakrabarty's. Criticism of a purely secular perspective is a recurrent theme of *Provincializing Europe*, as the following passage shows: "Although the God of monotheism may have taken a few knocks—if not actually 'died'—in the nineteenth-century European story of 'the disenchantment of the world,' the gods and other agents inhabiting practices of so-called 'superstition' have never died anywhere."[55]

Criticism of historicism; rejection of a single, homogeneous historical time; emphasis on a sacred time, and more generally on the persistence of the sacred in our contemporary world—is it possible that these themes had something to do with the work of Eliade, a name that is never mentioned in Chakrabarty's book? In fact, the very title *Provincializing Europe* might recall a passage from the foreword to *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Here is Eliade:

> With us, it is an old conviction that Western philosophy is dangerously close to "provincializing" itself (if the expression be permitted): first by jealously isolating itself in its own tradition and ignoring, for example, the problems and solutions of Oriental thought; second by its obstinate refusal to recognize any "situations" except those of the

53. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

54. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 23 and note 68 (see also p. 15 and passim); Benjamin, *Sul concetto di storia*, 44–46.

55. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 16.

> man of the historical civilizations, in defiance of the experience of "primitive" man, of man as a member of the traditional societies.[56]

Curiously, this passage seems much closer to Chakrabarty's perspective than the sentence by Hans-Georg Gadamer placed as the first epigraph to *Provincializing Europe*: "Europe . . . since 1914 has become *provincialized* . . . only the natural sciences are able to call forth a quick international echo."[57] Gadamer was noting, and complaining about, a well-known fact; Chakrabarty, on the contrary, is enunciating his plan of attack: "The Europe I seek to provincialize or decenter."[58] And Eliade? As we have seen, Eliade identified the self-provincialization of Europe as a danger that could be avoided by adopting a decentered perspective: a move in which, for reasons related to his own biography, India, and particularly Calcutta, played a decisive role. Eliade was also, in his own way, provincializing Europe.

## XI

This convergence may be ascribed either to mere chance or to an unconscious recollection. But it points to the potential ambivalence of Eliade's legacy (and here I am especially thinking of *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, by far his most important book). While the right-wing reception of Eliade's work is a well-known, amply documented phenomenon, it is hardly unthinkable that the left could find aspects of his work attractive (although I would deeply regret it). This possibility is not related to Eliade's work, which is devoid of all ambiguity, but to its reception. One day *The Myth of the Eternal Return* might be taken up as an antiglobalization, postcolonial, ecological manifesto.

You probably noted that I spoke of a right-wing and a left-wing reception of Eliade's work, tacitly dismissing the possibility of a different reading that lacked a strong ideological disposition. In fact, I share the attitude of those—more and more numerous, I must say—who find something deeply problematic in Eliade's work from an intellectual (not only political) point of view. A long time ago, in a letter addressed to Furio Jesi, Kerényi scornfully wrote: "You succeeded

56. Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, xii, "Foreword" (dated Paris, October 1952). This passage was already included in the introduction to the French original edition. See also Dubuisson, *Imposture et pseudo-science*, 62, quoting from Eliade's *La nostalgie des origines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971): "Une réaction contre ce qu'on pourrait appeler christianisme 'provincial,' c'est-à-dire purement occidental." In 1935 Eliade wrote to Cioran: "The only important thing is that Europe is going to die. . . . I hope that Romania does not belong to this continent which discovered secular sciences, philosophy and social equality" (quoted in Turcanu, *Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, 243).

57. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 3.

58. Ibid., 3–4.

in finding something interesting even in the work of the trivial Eliade."[59] Kerényi was apparently a haughty man.[60] He may have been jealous of Eliade's fame; he probably thought that Eliade had rendered some of his own ideas quite banal; but he also understood that Eliade, a voracious reader and an incredibly prolific writer, was not interested in a critical approach to religion.[61] Eliade preferred to impose his own irresistible categories on a vast amount of (mostly secondhand) evidence. A long time ago historians got rid of the category *homo oeconomicus*; Eliade's *homo religiosus* is equally fruitless.[62] His work does not help us to understand the largely enchanted, or re-enchanted, world we live in. In order to understand religious phenomena—in fact, all historical phenomena—we need critical distance, not tautologies.

I am well aware that critical distance is (or has become) a contentious notion. The reason is simple: the ambivalence I mentioned in the title of my essay is part of a larger context, in which Left, Right, Enlightenment, and anti-Enlightenment clash, crisscross, and overlap on specific issues. The case I have been dealing with reminds us, in its potential developments, that the age of simple dichotomies is over.[63]

59. Furio Jesi and Karl Kerényi, *Demone e mito: Carteggio 1964–1968*, ed. M. Kerényi and Andrea Cavalletti (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1999), 100 (letter dated Ascona June 22, 1967).

60. On Kerényi's personal attitude, see the remarks of his pupil Angelo Brelich in *Storia delle religioni, perché?* (Naples: Liguori, 1979), 62–64.

61. See Dubuisson, *Impostures et pseudo-science*.

62. Bruce Lincoln, a former pupil of Eliade, wrote in his *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 146: "I see only a limited future for the kinds of research he [Eliade] pursued."

63. See Adriano Sofri in *La Repubblica*, October 14, 2006.

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